

To Lend the Dead a Voice:
Second-Generation German Visual Art

Katja Kessin
(aka MacLeod)

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ABSTRACT

To Lend the Dead a Voice: Second-Generation German Visual Art

Katja Kessin (aka MacLeod), Ph.D.
Concordia University, 2003

This dissertation is a study of five second-generation German visual artists (i.e., artists born between 1940 and 1970 who are the descendants of Jewish and Gentile Germans of the Third Reich) who deal with the legacy of the Third Reich in their artwork.

Informed by contemporary trauma theory, the project traces how the psychological residue inherited from their parents' Third Reich experience has ingrained itself in the social life of contemporary Jews and Germans, finding expression both directly and obliquely in the works of second-generation artists. It is my conviction that the legacy of the Third Reich must be addressed productively in order to accomplish what psychoanalysis has coined the labour of mourning. Because public discourse around World War II and the Holocaust is still subject to a significant reticence, especially among Jews and Germans, alternate means of communication may be found in visual art production.

I conducted personal interviews with selected artists in Canada and Germany, namely Brigitte Radecki, Suse Rumland, Eva Brandl, and Bettina Hoffmann, followed by a thorough theoretical analysis of their work and examination of their personal data. As a second-generation German visual artist, I also included my own work in the study. My study establishes that second-generation German visual artists are in a unique position to contribute

to a necessary labour of mourning that was bypassed by their parents' generation and that they approach this difficult task in significant ways.

As a visual artist, my studio art practice habitually informs my theoretical investigations. Therefore the first part of this thesis consisted of a series of three solo exhibitions (*Speechless*, *The Grim Reaper*, and *2001 Earth Odyssey*), which were exhibited simultaneously in Montreal in August 2002. They addressed issues of trauma and recovery as experienced by one second-generation artist, with the intent of establishing community and opening new venues for discussion.

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to those without voice who need to be heard.

They include my grandmother, Katharina Kessin.

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PREFACE

In 1988 I woke up startled after a strange dream that I had spent the night working in the studio, painting a large canvas. The dream painting depicted a group of old women in a salon, huddled around a table set for tea. The women appeared to be starving, their intent eyes directed at the observer. The table tilted slightly downwards, and a single empty chair was visible at the bottom edge of the canvas, in between the women and the viewer. The women seemed to be beckoning me to sit down with them. Behind them a secret passageway leads into unknown places. Strangely, the plates set before them appeared to have holes in them. The dream also revealed the painting's title to me, in German: *Den Toten eine Stimme geben* (fig. 1.1)

My reaction to the dream was one of panic. I felt that I had indeed worked very hard all night and finished a large work on canvas of which I had been robbed in waking. It also seemed that there was an important message hidden in the painting. However, there was no actual painting to contemplate, and the dream was fading fast. I felt a great sense of loss and urgency. Without thinking further about the meaning of the image, I took a spare canvas and copied my dream painting from memory as quickly and as accurately as possible, holding onto the image with all my might while the scene was still vivid in my mind. When I finished the canvas for the second time, I translated the title into English: *To Lend the Dead a Voice*.

Only when I had recovered the loss of something that seemed so important did I take the time to ponder the meaning of the work. I realized that the woman at the head of the table had my grandmother's features. The other old women sitting around the table looked like her acquaintances, with whom she used to meet once a week for company at a tea organized by the village church. They came from all walks of life and had nothing else in common but the fact that they were Germans,

survivors of World War II, refugees, and they had all lost their husbands and sons in the Third Reich. They were a lonely leftover of the recent war, starved for companionship, and in desperate need to talk about the past. But to the generation of Third Reich "perpetrators," speaking about their experience of that past outside the lines of the official history of the Third Reich was taboo. All they could do was meet for coffee and cake once a week, while their actual "plates" remained empty and thus they always came home hungry. In 1988, at the time of my dream, these women were long dead and I had left Germany for Canada a decade earlier. So where did the dream come from, and what was its hidden message? The most important message seemed to be that for a German there was no escape from the Third Reich past, not by running to Canada, and not by pretending that it was nothing that concerned me. In 1988, the unhappy dream women forced me to sit down to listen and to share their meagre meal. I now know that other artists listen to other lost voices, and, like me, look into the secret passageways, in the hope that some lost truths may be discovered and some restless dead may be put to rest.

In 1998, a decade after I painted my dream canvas, it revealed itself to have been the initial driving force behind my doctoral thesis "To Lend the Dead a Voice: Second Generation German Visual Art." The project researches artists who, like me, are the descendants of Third Reich Germans, and who – at first subconsciously, then consciously – confront the Third Reich legacy through their art.

CHAPTER 1

Second-Generation Art and the Traumatic Residue of the Third Reich

This dissertation considers the work of second-generation German visual artists: those artists who are the descendants of Jewish and Gentile Germans of the Third Reich. Prior to the Second World War, the German bourgeoisie consisted of a community of both Jewish and Gentile Germans. This former community violently split apart in the Third Reich and passed on the trauma they experienced to the next generation, which is now commonly referred to as the second generation, a term by which I am including both Jewish and German contemporaries. I am particularly interested in the degree to which Third Reich experience has created a form of trauma that has ingrained itself in the social life of contemporary Germans, finding expression both directly and obliquely in the works of second-generation artists. Although both Third Reich Germans and their descendants have been reticent to publicly discuss the Second World War and the Holocaust, the discussion has nevertheless been taking place in visual art production.

My research into visual art produced by second-generation German artists includes my own studio art practice, which regularly informs my theoretical investigations. I am a second-generation German visual artist with Jewish and Gentile German relatives. My subject matter often revolves around the subject of the Second World War, the Third Reich, and the Holocaust. The first non-textual part of my thesis consisted of a series of three solo exhibitions, which were on exhibit simultaneously in Montreal in August 2002: *2001 Earth Odyssey* at the Maison de la Culture Notre-Dame-de-Grace, *The Grim Reaper* at Concordia University's Visual Arts gallery, and *Speechless* at Concordia's Bourget gallery.

These three exhibitions addressed issues of trauma and recovery and evolved over the course of my studies. Two of the exhibitions, *2001 Earth Odyssey* and *The Grim Reaper*, have also been exhibited in Germany, because it is important that my visual encounters with the Third Reich legacy are shown to the German public as well as to my Canadian audience. The exhibitions provided a comprehensive example of one second-generation German visual art practice, shared with a larger community. In my experience, and the experience of others I have discussed the issue with, there are still forbidden – or at least areas of reticence – when it comes to any discussion of Nazi Germany. The production of art that trespasses these zones opens new venues for discussion of a subject that appears to be insufficiently addressed by talk alone.

My written thesis makes up the second part of my doctoral research. In this study I analyze the artwork of the second generation, to expand contemporary discourse around the Third Reich and the Holocaust. The purpose of my study is threefold. First, I aim to study second-generation German visual artists as a comprehensive group to discover if their art practice might be made up of less conscious, unpremeditated engagements with the subject of Nazi Germany in comparison with Holocaust art. Second, my study aims to define the parameters of what such an art practice consists of. Third, the study explores the goals of second-generation German visual art, and determines whether these goals are accomplished.

Because of the nature of my study, it was important that my research subjects had not been considered in connection with the Holocaust. These artists are different and distinct from those German artists discussed in much of the presently available literature on Holocaust art. Scholars such as Ernst van Alphen (*Caught by History: Holocaust Effects in Contemporary Art, Literature, and Theory*, 1997), Manuel Köppen and Klaus Scherpe (*Bilder des Holocaust: Literatur, Film,*

Bildende Kunst, 1997), Kai Uwe Hemken (*Gedächtnisbilder: Vergessen und Erinnern in der Gegenwartskunst*, 1996), and Andreas Huyssen (*Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*, 1994) have already examined the work of artists who knowingly and/or willingly approach the Holocaust and related subject matter in their oeuvre, often in documentary or representational fashion. Ernst van Alphen has examined Holocaust literature, testimony, and art in *Caught by History*, combining the use of narratology, trauma theory, interpretation theory, and other theoretical positions to address, among other issues, the subject of "Testimonies and the Limits of Representation" (41-64). Saul Friedlander, as editor of *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"* (1992), initiated a larger discussion of the limits of representation with regards to the Holocaust.

Numerous contemporary artists have been widely discussed in a Holocaust context, and many of them have publicly entered the discussion themselves. A well-known example of a contemporary artist of second-generation German background is Anselm Kiefer.¹ But my project is not interested in artists who knowingly and directly approach the subject matter of Nazi Germany from the onset, but rather investigates artists' less conscious, oblique encounters with the legacy of the Third Reich.

The existing literature on Holocaust studies and Holocaust art provided me with a starting point for the work. There is still very little published work on second-generation Germans, because unlike the second-generation Jewish generation, Germans dealing with the Third Reich in art seems to be a recent phenomenon. Although none of these books dealt explicitly with my exact interests, they still provided me with a better understanding of various issues and

¹ Anselm Kiefer is considered in *Gedächtnisbilder* (1996), *Bilder des Holocaust* (1997), *Twilight Memories* (1995), *Caught by History* (1998), and *Landscape and Memory* (1995) in this context.

approaches. Ernst van Alphen's *Caught by History: Holocaust Effects in Contemporary Art, Literature, and Theory* (1998) was an especially key text. Although the artists that van Alphen addresses in his study are well-known for working with the Holocaust, it was his concept of "giving the past a place" that was useful for my project. It is my conviction that art can function visually as a representation of the non-representational aspects of a traumatic event. This is supported by Ernst Van Alphen, who claims that "Memories are representations of the past... Traumas are very different, both structurally and in effect. A traumatic event cannot be fully experienced at the moment it happens; as a consequence, it cannot be remembered. Only in repetition, after the fact, can a trauma become an experienced event" (36).

Van Alphen believes that, whereas a memory is clearly distinct from an event being remembered, in the case of trauma, reality and representation are inseparable. With this loss of distinction between them, the representation becomes the event (36). The art of Christian Boltanski is used as an example of how artistic processes may be able to constructively address traumatic memory, particularly with regards to the ongoing discussion of the representability of the Holocaust.² Van Alphen says of Boltanski's 1986 *Shadows* series that the figures of death and the dead are present in their immediate correspondence with their living projections. Thus the piece does not represent the dead but brings them back to life. In effect, those who were the victims of death are no longer overwhelmingly present in their confrontational absence. According to Van Alphen, this is

² See Ernst van Alphen, *Caught by History: Holocaust Effects in Contemporary Art, Literature, and Theory*, especially chapter 4 (93-122).

Boltanski's answer to the Holocaust's unrepresentability, and the urgent need to keep its memory alive (175).³

Nachum T. Gidal's *Die Juden in Deutschland von der Römerzeit bis zur Weimarer Republik* (German Jewry from Roman Times to the Weimar Republic) familiarized me with a detailed history of German Jews up to the Second World War, while the fate of German Jewry in Nazi Germany was illuminated in several items I read.⁴ Saul Friedlander's *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe* provided me with a better understanding of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust.

Another area of readings focused on the Gentile German population in Nazi Germany from a variety of perspectives. Ulla Lachauer's *Ostpreussische Lebensläufe* (*East Prussian Life*), focuses on the expulsion and exile of Prussian Germans at the end of the Second World War. Erika Mann's *Zehn Millionen Kinder: Die Erziehung der Jugend im Dritten Reich* (*Ten Million Children: The Upbringing of Third-Reich Youth*), provided information on how the education of children in the Third Reich was geared towards the war effort. Also interesting for my project were items that focused on contemporary Jewish and Gentile Germans. They include Charles S. Maier's *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust and German National Identity*, Susan Stern's compilation *Speaking Out: Jewish Voices from United Germany*, and Karen Remmler and Sander L. Gilman's collection called *Re-emerging Jewish Culture in Germany: Life and Literature since 1989*. These texts provided me with an

³ Aside from van Alphen, I also consulted Kai-Uwe Hemken's *Gedächtnisbilder: Vergessen und Erinnern in der Gegenwartskunst* (1996) [Images of Memory: Forgetting and Remembrance in Contemporary Art], Jürgen Kleist's *Das Dilemma der Kunst* (1998) [The Dilemma Faced by Art], Manuel Köppen's *Kunst und Literatur nach Auschwitz* (1993) [Art and Literature after Auschwitz], and Manuel Köppen and Klaus Scherpe's *Bilder des Holocaust* (1997) [Images of the Holocaust].

⁴ For example, Yehuda Bauer's *A History of the Holocaust* (1982), Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wipperman's *The Racial State: Germany, 1933 - 1945* (1991), and Lucy Davidowicz's *The War Against the Jews: 1933 - 1945* (1975).

overview of relations between the two Third Reich German populations before, during, and after the Second World War.

Framing the Project

For the purpose of my study, I defined second-generation German visual artists as those artists who were born to German parents who resided in Germany during the Third Reich. My decision to extend the category to include the German second generation is supported by others. For example, Dan Bar-On says that, "in both countries [Germany and Israel] the third generation had absorbed some of the difficulties, which the second generation – that is their parental generation – had experienced when they were confronted with the Holocaust."⁵ Ulla Roberts, in her work *Spuren der NS-Zeit im Leben der Kinder und Enkel* (Traces of the Nazi Era in the Lives of Children and Grandchildren) explains how she uses "the classification of 'first,' 'second' and 'third generation,' terms which originally were developed in studies of Holocaust survivors, their children and grandchildren. These terms are also used in the study of the perpetrator generation and their descendants."⁶ The publishers of *Das Ende der Sprachlosigkeit*, a book on psychotherapy (the effects of traumatic Holocaust experiences over several generations), explain that many of their psychotherapy "clients were influenced by the horrors of the Second World War and the Holocaust during childhood... It appears that this was independent from the clients being children of those traumatized by the Holocaust, children of

⁵ Dan Bar-On, Konrad Brendler, and A.P. Hare, *Da ist etwas kaputtgegangen an den Wurzeln: Identitätsformation deutscher und israelischer Jugendlicher im Schatten des Holocaust*. Frankfurt/Main - New York: Campus Verlag, 1997 22.

⁶ Ulla Roberts, *Spuren der NS-Zeit im Leben der Kinder und Enkel*. (Munich: Koesel-Verlag GmbH&Co., 1998), 8. (Traces of the Nazi Era in the Lives of the Children and Grandchildren)

bystanders or children of actual perpetrators.”⁷ Bar-On (1989) addresses the similarities between these groups of children in the following narrative account: “before I went to Germany, Tova [one of the author’s Israeli students] asked me to find out if the children of victimizers ‘wish to kill in their dreams as I wish to die in mine.’ When I returned, I told her that I had not found the answer, but I believed that in their dreams they also wished to die” (332).

In his essay “Mediums of Memory: Artistic Responses of the Second Generation,” Stephen Feinstein notes that, since the 1980s, many second-generation Holocaust survivors have turned to art as a medium for expressing their personal relation to the Holocaust.⁸ He further argues that, although the Holocaust is an event that these artists did not live through, the memory of the event has a compelling presence for them. Feinstein asserts that these “second-generation survivors” have attempted to create a vehicle through art for making the event – that is the Holocaust – comprehensible to themselves as well as to a wider audience (201).

Although I agree with Feinstein’s general observations, I also believe that the term “second generation survivor” is a dangerous concoction for the way it inherently implies the existence of a second, unspoken term: that of the “second-generation perpetrator.” For my discussion of the work of some “second generation artists,” it is therefore important to extend Feinstein’s notion to include all those artists whose parents resided in the Third Reich, and whose lives have thus been traumatically impacted. It is my belief that this impact has an effect, to a

⁷ Liliane Opher-Cohn, preface in *Das Ende der Sprachlosigkeit? Auswirkungen traumatischer Holocaust-Erfahrungen über mehrere Generationen* (Giessen, Germany: Psychosozialverlag, 2000), 7. (The End of Speechlessness? The Effect of Traumatic Holocaust Experiences over Several Generations)

⁸ In Efraim Sicher *Breaking Crystal: Writing and Memory after Auschwitz* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 201-51.

certain extent, for all the immediate descendants of the players in Hitler's violent Third Reich.

Feinstein takes note that most second-generation artists come to their self definition only after wide-ranging experimentation with artistic expression through forms or movements commonly accepted in the mainstream of contemporary art. It is only after mastering traditional art-making techniques that many artists enter into the world of such forbidden subjects as the Holocaust. Feinstein uses the term "forbidden" because it encompasses both the taboos of depiction and metaphor and the question of authenticity. And what is most forbidden is that constant point of conflict in the post-Holocaust discourse on the limits of representation: appropriation of the Holocaust (202-203).

It is my conviction that the descendants of Third Reich Germans have been traumatically affected by the Second World War, the Third Reich, and the Holocaust. Even though they may not have been directly exposed to traumatic experiences, contemporary trauma theory confirms that they may have inherited the trauma from their parental generation. I propose that such an inherited trauma – denied, repressed, and latent as it may be – might eventually surface in the artwork of second generation German individuals. I further propose that, rather than being a mere visual re-enactment of an inherited trauma, such visual artworks might play a key role in a delayed yet necessary process of working through the residue of Germany's Third Reich legacy.

In 1967 Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich and, more recently, Eric Santner in 1991, have defined this process as a "labour of mourning." They deem it a process necessary in grieving and recovery, and argue that it was bypassed by the first generation of Third Reich Germans, and thus the trauma was passed on to the second generation. Alexander Mitscherlich was born in Germany in 1908. (He died in 1982.) He was a medical doctor and lectured at the universities of Heidelberg

and Frankfurt. From 1959 to 1976 he was the director of the Sigmund Freud Institute in Frankfurt, and was awarded the *Friedenspreis* – peace award – by German publishers in 1967. Margarete Mitscherlich was born in Denmark in 1917. She is a medical doctor and psychoanalyst, as well as a member of the Sigmund Freud Institute.

Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich's *The Inability to Mourn*, originally published in German in 1967 under the title *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern*, studied the repression and denial of the Nazi German experience in post-war Germany. When the Mitscherlichs first published their ground-breaking study, they were struck by the apparent absence of any sustained emotional confrontation with the Nazi past in post-war German society. Deep feelings of contrition and a genuine urge to heal injury had not followed upon recognition of complicity in horrific crimes; shame had not followed upon loss of face among nations; and the desire to remember had not followed upon the testimonies of Holocaust survivors.

The Mitscherlichs argue that the population of the new Federal Republic seemed to have avoided what should have been the appropriate psychological reaction to Germany's defeat. They refused to directly confront the facts of the Holocaust and the loss of Hitler as their leader. According to trauma theory, the result of such a denial should have been a massive fall into depression and melancholy, but this traumatic reaction was delayed. The Mitscherlichs argue that a process of real mourning never took place in post-war Germany, because of a remarkably efficient deployment of defence mechanisms that served to burn affective bridges to the past.⁹

Eric Santner built on the Mitscherlichs' work on refused mourning. (Eric Santner is the Chair of the Department of Germanic Studies at the University of

⁹ A summary of Mitscherlichs' study can be found in Eric Santner's *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory and Film in Postwar Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 1.

Chicago.) His book called *Stranded Objects* is a reworking of the couple's *The Inability to Mourn*, in which the Mitscherlichs reworked and applied Freud's concept of the work of mourning in the context of post-war Germans. In *Stranded Objects*, Santner applies the Mitscherlichs' theory to the second and third generation of post-war Germans, while situating the historical tasks of mourning after Auschwitz within a larger context of mourning "tasks." *Stranded Objects* also offers insight into some recent artistic efforts by members of the second generation in Germany to engage in the beginnings of working through the traumatic residue of the Third Reich past. These efforts are indicative of what first Freud, then the Mitscherlichs, and now Santner call a "labour of mourning," a concept which I consider applicable in the analysis of the five artists in my study.

In *Stranded Objects*, Eric Santner argues that the psychological dilemma currently faced by second-generation Germans is not inherited guilt so much as the denial of guilt, not losses so much as lost opportunities to mourn losses. However, Santner adds that it might be more important that, along with this negative legacy of denial and repression, post-war generations may have also inherited the psychic structures that impeded mourning in the generations of their parents and grandparents (34). Recent research points to similar psychological disturbances in the children of both Gentile and Jewish Germans of the Third Reich.¹⁰ In both cases and despite obvious differences, there have been major breaks in what could be considered a natural generational chain, and insufficient mourning processes, that have left an unresolved trauma for the second generation to inherit (Mitscherlich).

Eric Santner notes that, despite extensive studies of the effects of the Holocaust experience on the children of survivors, it is only in recent years that the psychic legacy of the Nazi period on the children of the perpetrators has begun to

¹⁰ For example, Bar-On, *Da ist etwas kaputtgegangen an den Wurzeln*, and Roberts, *Spuren der NS-Zeit im Leben der Kinder und Enkel*.

be articulated. He mentions one series of case studies of the second generation of the perpetrators; it was published in the context of a larger work concerned primarily with the children of Holocaust survivors, and shows remarkable similarities between the case histories of the children of the oppressed and those of the oppressors. Of particular significance was the responsibility felt, at least by those members of the second generation who sought treatment, to perform or accomplish the psychic work that their parents failed to accomplish (Santner 35).

This sense of second-generation psychological responsibility has perhaps been best explored by the Swiss psychoanalyst Alice Miller. (Born in 1923, Miller obtained her doctorate in philosophy in 1953. She became well known in North America when her book, *The Drama of the Gifted Child*, hit the *New York Times* bestseller list and stayed there in the mid 1980s.) After practising for twenty years in Zurich, in 1980 she discontinued her practice as a psychoanalyst and stopped lecturing in order to engage in systematic studies on the issue of childhood. Alice Miller left the international association of psychoanalysts (IPA) in 1988, due to her conviction that psychoanalytical theory and practice is an inadequate means for making visible and healing childhood trauma.¹¹

Miller's books provided me with a stimulus and entry point for my research because she has written extensively about childhood experience and its relation to adult life, in order to reveal how specific forms of child-rearing affect the adult life. According to Miller, unless early trauma is resolved, parents will pass it on to their children who, in an attempt at resolution, may react in various destructive or self-destructive ways or pass the trauma on to yet another generation in a more obscure disguise. One potential form of resolution Miller posits can be found in art

¹¹ My summary and translation of the back-cover synopsis of Miller's *Abbruch der Schweigemauer* (Breaking Down the Wall of Silence) (Hamburg: Hoffmann and Campe Verlag, 1999).

production. She also finds that within art practice, knowledge is contained which may not reveal itself to the artist otherwise. The two books most pertinent to my research are Miller's 1983 text called *Du sollst nicht merken (Thou Shalt Not be Aware)* and *Bilder einer Kindheit (Pictures of a Childhood)*. In Chapter 4 of *Du sollst nicht merken (Thou Shalt Not be Aware)*, Miller develops her thoughts on creativity in the context of trauma theory. She argues that early childhood trauma, which has been repressed, often resurfaces from the unconscious in the creative practice of visual artists and writers, without this being noticed by either the artists or their audience. Miller considers *Bilder einer Kindheit (Pictures of a Childhood)* to be the direct continuation of that discussion: using herself as her own research subject, she both chronicles and comments on her attempt to gain access to and work through childhood trauma in a visual art practice. She describes her own process like this:

What surfaced from my images were the suppressed emotions of my childhood, the fear, the despair, the loneliness, and at first I found myself alone in the task of working-through....I wanted no psychoanalytical explanations, no Jungian reading. I only wanted for that child to "talk" in my paintings until I could understand her language. (*Bilder einer Kindheit* 17, my translation)

Alice Miller brings her interest in finding a way for the traumatized child to "talk" when she looks at other artists as well. For example, Miller says of Franz Kafka that he once entered into his diary that a writer must hold onto his desk "by the teeth," in order to escape the insanity which would ensue if he were to ever stop writing. She believes that this need for tenacity against craziness holds true for all creative practices, as they allow us to battle past demons, to bring order to chaos, and thus to overcome fear (11). More recently Miller's views have been elaborated by Griselda Pollock in an essay that considers the function of art in a Holocaust context:

We must also acknowledge the impact of this event on art theory and practice itself. Thus models of art as expression, art as comfort, art as idealisation, art as pure aesthetic experience, or even the idea of art

enclosed within a direct object, have been challenged and definitively displaced by the discoveries about the intimacy between the origins of art and the shape of trauma in the human psyche. Art becomes a singular and necessary means to return to an inner space, to allow a momentary visibility to affects that themselves, psychically, have no meaning that could be spoken, described or expressed, affects that are linked, nonetheless, to the very foundations of the psyche in its relation to archaic losses. What indicates the trauma in art is never a picturing of it as content, but rather the need to repeat, to return to this affect-laden realm that art alone allows to seep into legibility through aesthetic awareness.¹²

If, as Pollock insists, art is the only vehicle that can allow an "affect-laden realm" of trauma "to seep into legibility," then I propose that the second generation in particular may be in an advantageous position to provide us with missing links to a rupture in German history (in their encounters with the repressed past of the Third Reich in their art practice, and in their efforts to make their art practice available to a larger public). The public exhibition of their artistic investigations may be viewed as necessary to a healing process on a broader, communal basis, and as an effort of establishing community for their own processes of working through traumatic residue.¹³

As Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger (a second-generation artist and a psychoanalytical theorist) has written, psychoanalytic thought concerning both art and repetition revolves around the impossibility of undoing an originary repression

¹² Griselda Pollock, *Catching and Losing the Sands of Time: The Dialectics of Place and No-Place in Jewish Being and Memory in the Work of Lily Markiewicz* (photocopied catalogue, 1999), 7.

¹³ Other related books of interest are Ilany Kogan's *The Cry of Mute Children: A Psychoanalytic Perspective of the Second Generation of the Holocaust* (1995); Björn Krondorfer's *Remembrance and Reconciliation: Encounters between Young Jews and Germans* (New Haven and London, Yale University: Yale University Press, 1995); Liliane Opher-Cohn's *Das Ende der Sprachlosigkeit? Auswirkungen traumatischer Holocaust-Erfahrungen über mehrere Generationen* [The End of Speechlessness? The Effects of Traumatic Holocaust Experiences over Several Generations] (Giessen, Germany: Psychosozialverlag, 2000); Ulla Roberts' *Spuren der NS-Zeit im Leben der Kinder und Enkel* [Traces of the Nazi Era in the Life of the Children and Grandchildren] (Munich: Koesel-Verlag GmbH & Co., 1998); and Astrid von Friesen's *Der lange Abschied: Psychische Spätfolgen für die 2. Generation deutscher Vertriebener* [The Long Good – bye: The Late Psychological Effects on the Second Generation of Germans Refugees] (Giessen, Germany: Psychosozial-Verlag, 2000).

and accessing a psychic "Thing."¹⁴ The traumatic "Thing" struggles unsuccessfully to re-approach psychic awareness, but can find only momentary relief in symptomatic repetitions, or subterfuge, in artwork. However, I disagree with Ettinger's claim that it is impossible to get at the original repressed experience, as I believe that the artist can provide us with the necessary language through which she, and her audience, may approach an original trauma, in the hope of nearing resolution.

I have drawn a closer definition of the term trauma from Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery - The aftermath of violence from domestic abuse to political terror*. Judith Herman is an Associate Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at the Harvard Medical School and Director of Training at the Victims of Violence Program at Cambridge Hospital. According to Herman, Traumatic reactions occur when action is of no avail:

When neither resistance nor escape is possible, the human system of self-defense becomes overwhelmed and disorganized. Each component of the ordinary response to danger, having lost its utility, tends to persist in an altered and exaggerated state long after the actual danger is over. Traumatic events produce profound and lasting changes in physiological arousal, emotion, cognition, and memory.
(34)

Herman defines psychological trauma as an affliction of the powerless. According to the author, victims are rendered helpless by an overwhelming force at the moment trauma occurs. Herman distinguishes between forces of nature, or disasters, and forces of other human beings, or atrocities. In either case, "Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning." (33) Herman explains that the ordinary response to atrocities is their banishment from consciousness, but that their banishment through denial ultimately is unsuccessful:

¹⁴ Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger quoted in Pollock, *Catching and Losing the Sands of Time*, 9.

Certain violations of the social compact are too terrible to utter aloud: this is the meaning of the word unspeakable. Atrocities, however, refuse to be buried. Equally as powerful as the desire to deny atrocities is the conviction that denial does not work. Folk wisdom is filled with ghosts who refuse to rest in their graves until their stories are told. (1)

It is Herman's employment of the terms "unspeakable" and her description of restless ghosts, waiting for their stories to be told, which have made her framing of the notion of trauma particularly appropriate for my study.

My Role and Approach

My hypotheses are based on my own experiences and art practice as a second-generation German visual artist. I emigrated from Germany to Canada over twenty years ago. Because my entire formation as a professional artist took place in Canada, influences from an exposure to a German environment as an adult were minimal. However, in my practice as an artist living and working in Canada, I noticed over the years that certain themes appeared in my artwork consistently, themes in conjunction with the Third Reich, the Second World War, and the Holocaust. Although initially this subject matter related to Nazi Germany surfaced in my artwork unintentionally, once I became aware of my subconscious engagement with the legacy of the Third Reich, my art practice slowly became a more conscious engagement with a subject matter that somehow did not let go of me, despite the fact that I had left Germany years ago and considered myself to be a Canadian artist.

This insistence on the Third Reich as a subject struck me as curious, especially because in hindsight I realized I had left Germany on my own as an eighteen year old (leaving behind all security, family, and friends), because of a desire to escape the legacy of Nazi Germany. This legacy had caused me to feel guilty, helpless, and even worthless as an adolescent. Although I was unaware of it at the time, moving to Canada seemed to provide me with an opportunity for a

new, non-German identity and the chance to leave a burden behind: the legacy of the Third Reich and the confusion, speechlessness, guilt, and shame which were bound to this legacy and seemed too heavy to carry. Of course at the time, this burden did not logically appear to be my responsibility to carry, as I had been born fourteen years after the end of the Second World War.

But when the subject matter of Nazi Germany continued to surface in my artwork, it eventually forced me to become consciously aware of my persistent underlying concerns. I became curious whether this surfacing of latent material – which I initially was unaware of due to the repression of traumatic residue – was a phenomenon particular to me, or whether it might in fact be shared with others. At a certain point in time the apparent obsession of my subconscious with the Third Reich made me feel “crazy.” I suspected, however, that rather than my being crazy, the eventual surfacing of the subject might be considered the normal result of having been born a second-generation German. Despite the fact that my subconscious seemed to force me to engage with the subject of the Third Reich consistently through my artwork, my work was not so much addressing my underlying concerns outright, but was employing oblique methods and personal experience as a way to approach Germany’s modern past.

As a second-generation German, I had not lived in the Third Reich. My first-generation German parents, traumatized by their personal experiences and losses and silenced by their generation’s implication in the Nazi horrors, had not discussed the subject of the Third Reich with their children in any kind of straightforward way. This caused me to suspect that the trauma experienced by the first generation may, in fact, be passed on to the second generation, resulting in a trauma that, undealt with, can be carried even over great distances and unbeknownst to those who are affected.

I further suspected that if, indeed, there were others like me, there might be a good reason – and even a need – for second-generation Germans to be producing this kind of work. Curious what in fact this need would be comprised of, I decided that I should research the work and life stories of other second-generation German artists like myself, for my own peace of mind. In conducting this research, hoped to obtain a sense of belonging by establishing a community and locating my art practice within a larger group of artists. In a broader sense I needed to conduct this study in order to unravel what I considered to be a mystery: the mystery that this kind of work appeared to be produced by artists who not only refrained from focusing on the Third Reich but who also most certainly would not consider themselves to be Holocaust artists. In retrospect I realize that the study also had the promise of personal closure for me, as the legacy of the Third Reich continues to haunt and preoccupy me.

At first, I envisioned a large-scale investigation, which would have involved interviewing a great number of artists, the collection of their biographical data, as well as the analysis of their artworks in a quantitative study. I decided that this process would not do justice to the artists involved. A quantitative approach would have resulted in a superficial investigation that would not give me the opportunity to research and discover each artist as the complex individuals they turned out to be. I therefore decided to conduct a qualitative study instead, working with a very limited number of case studies.

I had framed my definition of second-generation German as those who were born to parents who lived in the Third Reich, and further limited it to those who had been born in the thirty-year time span between 1940 and 1970, a period which would most certainly capture the full scope of an entire generation. I decided to concentrate on a group of five key artists who fit the general parameters of the study. In choosing artists for my projects, I aimed to ensure that the thirty-year time

span of interest was covered in fairly equal distances between the artists' dates of birth, in order to obtain a representative sample of older and younger second-generation German visual artists.

I started the research process by contacting contemporary Canadian artists with Germanic names, in the hope that some of them would fit the parameters of my research group. Although I had met some of these artists in the past, I was generally unfamiliar with their art practices. Other artists were suggested by colleagues and friends. From these artists who appeared to have a German background, I compiled a preliminary list. Once I had a series of potential names, I researched the files of those who resided in Canada. From the Artexte resource centre in Montreal, I obtained copies of all material available on each artist on file, which included visual documentation of artworks, artist statements, biographical materials, and press commentaries. After consulting this material in depth, I selected those artists who matched my research parameters by date of birth and actual German background.

In these early stages, I came across artists who matched my general definition of second-generation German but proved to be inappropriate for the study because they were clearly aware of their engagement in a Holocaust discourse.¹⁵ In fact, it proved to be more difficult to find artists whose images seemed to point towards a subconscious engagement with the subject. In all, I retained the material on four artists residing in Montreal. To this list of artists I added two other visual artists who resided in Germany. Because I consistently attempt to include "my two countries" – Canada and Germany – in all my artistic

¹⁵ During this phase I was looking at artists such as Angela Grossmann, Lily Markiewicz, and Wendy Oberlander. I eliminated them from my list of potential research subjects because of their direct engagement in a Holocaust discourse, which is possibly connected to the fact that they are artists of Jewish descent and more comfortable in approaching the Holocaust in their art practice.

and academic endeavours, I decided to extend my search to Germany, to include second-generation German visual artists residing in Germany in the study. This would also give me an indication whether the same phenomenon occurs in Germany, and how it might differ from my Canadian experience. One of the artists I contacted in Germany had been referred by a contact, another I met in a discussion group after a talk I gave on my art practice in Germany in 1999. Based on the available documentation of their artworks, I decided whether it would be of interest to conduct interviews with all six of them and to analyze their artworks in the context of the parameters I had set out.

What struck me as noteworthy, but also did not come as a surprise, was how quickly it became evident that there was enough material for me to suppose that all six artists were indeed approaching the legacy of Nazi Germany in their art practice, without this necessarily being either a conscious or voluntary subject matter. In fact, none of these artists was overtly in contact with the Holocaust, either themselves or in the press, so they appeared to be ideal candidates for case studies. The fact that all of them were women was coincidental.

My next step was to contact the artists, to present them with my research project, and to ask for their willingness to participate in my study. Presenting my research project was a difficult step, as I had to clearly state the purpose of the project, which in turn might have resulted in these artists not being open to discuss their biographies and art practice with me in the light of my dissertation's discomfiting subject. I was pleasantly surprised when, after having read my abstract and speaking to me on the phone, all six artists were willing to be interviewed at length. In the case of the four artists residing in Canada, I made appointments for two three-hour interview sessions with them. The first interview was to collect their biographical data, whereas the second interview consisted of a discussion of their artworks that were of particular interest to my study. In the case

of the two artists residing in Germany, both their biography and their artworks were addressed in one lengthy interview rather than in two separate encounters.

As the development of my own art practice had served as my point of departure, it was clear to me from the start that I would include myself on the list of research subjects. I knew that there would be a great level of discomfort involved for artists of German background to be discussed in conjunction with the subjects of the Second World War, the Third Reich, and the Holocaust. Therefore it seemed only fair that I should expose myself to the same discomfort if I expected others to become involved in my project. The inclusion of myself as a research subject also nurtured a greater openness of the other artists during the interviewing process. Furthermore, because I have in-depth knowledge of my own development in the context of second-generation German visual art, the inclusion of my own practice served me with the guidelines for working with the other artists. I also wanted to approach the chapter on my own art practice as close as possible to the chapters on the other artists, and obtained permission from Dr. Loren Lerner to use her interviews with me which she had conducted in 2000. I conducted interviews with the other artists in 2001 (Canada) and 2002 (Germany).

The research and interviewing process was a difficult procedure because three different languages entered into it: English, German, and French. Fortunately I had studied foreign language correspondence and translation at the Foreign Language Institute in Hamburg, Germany prior to emigrating to Canada. Without the ability to conduct research in both English and German, and in both Canada and Germany, my study would not have been possible. Interviews with the six artists were conducted in either German or English. I transcribed all interview material and forwarded it to the artists for verification. At this stage they could also eliminate any information from the transcripts that they were not willing to make public. It is important to note here that in all cases there were only minor revisions

of a factual nature. In the case of interviews conducted in German, I also made my English translation of the original interview available to the artists to ensure accuracy. This process was viable because all six artists are fluent in English, but did not necessarily wish to be interviewed in that language.

During the interviews I asked few questions, but generally allowed for a narrative stream-of-consciousness account instead, particularly in the biographical component. The first interview addressed the artists' biographies as well as their parents' stories. At this point, I questioned the artists about their personal experiences and their memories of Germany, their memories of first encounters with the Holocaust, their experiences of the transition to Canada (in the case of artists residing in Canada), their feelings about being German, and their reactions to being studied in the context of second-generation German visual art. In the second interview I focused on the evolution of each artist's visual practice, as well as on particular works that I had chosen for discussion ahead of time. I had further asked the artists to suggest any other artworks that might be pertinent to the discussion (which they were able to do because they had previously read an abstract of my proposed research).

I prepared a minimum of questions for the interviews, which I asked each of the artists. However, I was more interested in those questions of a highly personal nature which the artists ended up formulating themselves, inspired by my more general questions. My questions, in order of their sequence, were:

1. What are the details of your biography?
2. What is your parents' biography?
3. Which memories do you have of Germany?
4. What are your memories of your transition to Canada?
5. When did you first become aware of the Holocaust in Nazi Germany?
6. What does being German mean to you?

During the interviewing process, one of the artists in Canada decided to withdraw from the project, after the first interview on biographical information. There was also an artist in Germany I had interviewed at length, whom I decided to exclude because she was born in 1971, just outside of the time period I had defined as the second generation. The remaining five artists, who are the focus of my dissertation, appear in order of their birth.

The Artists

Brigitte Radecki was born in Germany in 1940, to Gentile German parents. She emigrated with her family to Canada in 1952. She is the one artist born before the end of the Second World War, and thus the only one who has memories of Germany before 1945. I first took notice of Brigitte Radecki because of her German-sounding name. After viewing her artist file at Artexte, including records of her early installations, I was convinced that remnants of her native country's past were already apparent in her early work. I saw the first of Radecki's exhibitions in person after I had started my research on her art practice; they showed clear links to the subject of the Third Reich. I interviewed Radecki in English, but German often entered into our discussion of her biography and art practice, particularly when memories of Germany were invoked. She has been a practising artist and art teacher in Montreal for the past two decades.

Suse Rumland, born in Germany in 1948, is the daughter of a Gentile German mother and a Jewish German father. I first met her in Germany 2000, at a talk I gave about my work as a second-generation German visual artist. I had invited those members of the audience who were interested to continue the discussion of the subject, on the occasion of the opening of my exhibition, *The Grim Reaper*, which took place a few days later. Rumland came into the gallery with her portfolio of photographs. We entered a discussion on the second generation, at

the end of which she spread out her photographs on the gallery floor and invited me to pick one for myself. I chose an image on which two identical "Mr. Potato Head"-style figures grin at the viewer while lifting their left arms in a hailing gesture. On the basis of our discussion and after viewing her photographs, I later decided to approach her for an interview. I interviewed Rumland in German. Suse Rumland lives near Hamburg in Germany and has been a practising artist for twenty years.

Eva Brandl was born in Germany in 1951 to Gentile German parents. She emigrated to Canada twice with her family. Once in 1951 as a nine-month-old baby, and after returning to Germany with her family for a period of two years in 1960 at nine years old, she emigrated to Canada for a second time in 1962, at eleven years of age. I first met Eva Brandl in 1995 on the occasion of a talk that I gave as an invited artist at Marianapolis College in Montreal. I noticed her ability to speak German and confirmed that she was indeed of German background. After researching her file at Artexte, I decided to approach her for an interview. I interviewed Brandl in English. (Eva's mother tongue is German, but she mainly uses French in her daily life. Thus French as well as German entered into our discussion.) Eva Brandl has been a practising artist and art teacher in Montreal for the past twenty-five years.

Katja Kessin (aka MacLeod) was born in Germany in 1959 to Gentile German parents. I first came to Canada in 1977 on a tourist visa as a guest student in Visual Arts, and eventually became a landed immigrant in 1981. Although I am still most fluent in German, my mother tongue, English is the language I live and work in most of the time. However, much of the research material I ended up using for my study was written in German and required my translation. For the past fifteen years, I have been a practising artist in Montreal and have taught visual art for nearly a decade.

Bettina Hoffmann was born in Germany to Gentile German parents in 1964. She grew up in West Berlin and is a recent immigrant to Canada. For the past two years she has been a practising artist in Montreal. Before she emigrated to Canada, Hoffmann was a practising artist in Berlin for a decade. I was made aware of Hoffmann by a friend who had seen an exhibition of her work in Montreal, shortly after her emigration from Germany to Canada in 2000. After meeting with Hoffmann and viewing documentation of her artworks, it quickly became apparent that I wanted to include her in my study. In her daily life in Montreal, Hoffman uses mainly French, although her mother tongue is German. Interviews with her were conducted in German.

In choosing to work with these artists, I was able to cover a period of twenty-five years, the equivalent of what is commonly referred to as a generation, in this case the second generation of German visual artists. In my analysis of the artists' work, I have looked for similarities and differences in themes, subject matter, and approaches. I was especially interested in those artworks that were indicative of attempts to resolve a trauma connected to the legacy of Nazi Germany, a trauma that the artists might have inherited from their first-generation parents. I was further interested in determining to what extent these artists were aware of their attempts at making this underlying subject visible, and whether there was the potential of using their art practice as a vehicle towards recovery of trauma and resolution, both on the individual and communal level.

Research Models

In choosing both a research format and a model for my dissertation, I was particularly inspired by two books. The first one is by Dan Bar-On, *Legacy of Silence: Encounters with Children of the Third Reich*. Dan Bar-On is Associate Professor in the Department of Behavioural Sciences at the Ben Gurion University of the Negev and

has worked extensively with and written about both Gentile and Jewish members of the second generation. His method of interviewing research subjects results in a profile that, rather than relying heavily on statistical components, allows for a great amount of narrative. Bar-On also provided a model for my own project's method of choosing interview subjects. For *Legacy of Silence* he said, "I intentionally avoided... [those] who had already been the subject of media attention, because I suspected that they had developed an 'external self' in talking about their fathers and the Third Reich. I looked for people who had been left alone, for whom the past might have become part of an internal dialogue."¹⁶ Like Bar-On, I concentrated on people (in this case, artists) who had not commonly been considered in the context of the Holocaust.

Another more recent book by Dan Bar-On with two other authors was also important: *Da ist etwas kaputtgegangen an den Wurzeln: Identitätsformation deutscher und israelischer Jugendlicher im Schatten des Holocaust* (Something Was Destroyed at the Very Roots: Identity Formation of German and Israeli Youth in the Shadow of the Holocaust) summarizes the results of an empirical study in which 1,100 second- and third-generation youth in Israel and Germany were interviewed in the context of both their history and the present. The study focused on the youths' efforts to work through the legacy of the Holocaust. The two qualitative studies simultaneously illuminate the process of the psychological and social long-term effects of the Holocaust in both countries. Dan Bar-On's books have been particularly important to my study, as he is highlighting the similarities between the Jewish and Gentile second generation of Germans.

Another source for a dissertation model came from Ursula Hegi's *Tearing the Silence: On Being German in America* (1998). Ursula Hegi is an award-winning

¹⁶ Bar-On, Dan. *Legacy of Silence: Encounters with Children of the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 11.

novelist and a post-war German immigrant to America. For this book, Hegi interviewed post-war German immigrants who speak about the legacy of grief and shame that continues to haunt them in America. The interviews provide the reader with the personal histories of the research subjects as they confront the terrible and pervasive silence that made any mention of the Holocaust taboo in their homes and schools while they were growing up. In *Tearing the Silence*, Hegi captures their long-silent voices. The book is an important discussion on what it is like to grow up within the numbing silence of post-war Germany and what it means to live between two cultures. Hegi's book influenced the model for my dissertation, since it is a form of research that allows for a highly narrative format. *Tearing the Silence* also confirmed my decision to include myself in the study.¹⁷ This is how Hegi describes her decision to include her own story:

While writing my introduction and conclusion, I often felt conflicted in determining the level of my critical involvement. I did not want to judge, did not want to slam down, and yet I had strong reactions that I wanted to lift out. I finally resolved to deal with this by placing my own life story at the beginning because it establishes the direction from where the listening and the questions are coming. Since my essay evolved and changed over a span of several years, it naturally differs in form and introspection from interviews that were held over a span of hours. It provides a window through which to see these life stories, re-creating the journey I took while interviewing, and letting my readers develop their own insights before I offer mine in the conclusion. (26)

Like Hegi, by including myself I established not only a point from which to speak during the interviews but also a point of informed listening. And also like

¹⁷ I also familiarized myself with German literature pertinent to my subject, particularly autobiographies and fiction with autobiographical components. This aided me in understanding the complexities of Nazi Germany and its long-term influences on the psyche of those who lived in the Third Reich, as well as those who have been impacted by the traumatic residue of the Third Reich legacy. They were further helpful as the format I had chosen for my dissertation included a narrative aspect. Particularly insightful with respect to the Nazi era and its aftermath were Ruth Klüger's *Weiter Leben: Eine Jugend* [To Go on Living: My Youth] (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH & Co. KG, 1994); Angelika Schrobsdorff's *Du bist nicht so wie andre Mütter* [You Are Unlike Other Mothers] (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH & Co. KG, 1994); and Peter Roos's *Hitler lieben: Roman einer Krankheit* [Loving Hitler: A Novel about a Disease] (Leipzig: Reclam Verlag, 2000).

Hegi, I have let the artists speak for themselves before I draw conclusions about their work in chapter 7.

Chapter 2

Brigitte Radecki

Between the Lines

Brigitte Radecki is the only artist I worked with who was born before 1945. She is a Montreal artist and mother to three adult children. I interviewed Radecki extensively on 16 and 18 July 2001. All biographical data and quotes are drawn from these interviews, unless indicated otherwise.

Brigitte is the oldest of four children. She was born into a wealthy family in 1940, in Germany's East. Her tiny hometown was Siegersleben on the river Elbe, close to the city of Magdeburg. Brigitte's early childhood memories of the period before the Russian invasion in 1945 are very vivid and pleasant, especially those of her grandmother's place, where Brigitte was born and often went in the summer. Her grandmother lived on a large estate with grottos in the park which were wonderful for children to explore. Brigitte's mother's family is Huguenot; originally from France, they ended up in Germany. Brigitte's grandfather had an estate near Magdeburg, which he gave to her mother, and that is where the family lived until 1945. Brigitte's father is a Baltic German who was born in Riga. His family was originally displaced from there and ended up in Germany as well.

In 1945, while Brigitte's father was a soldier away from home, her mother fled with the four small children from the Russian invasion of Germany's East by trek, in a horse-drawn covered wagon. Brigitte's mother was overseeing the entire trek. In an effort to include the oldest child in the difficult process, Brigitte's mother made sure that, among other things, five-year-old Brigitte had to pay off the hired help. Other than the flight from home, Brigitte has few memories about the war and the difficult post-war years; she recalls mainly that the living conditions after fleeing Siegersleben were horrible. At first the family lived in barracks, and for a

long time they lived on nothing but bread and sour milk. Brigitte does not remember feeling scared during the war except for once when the family had to black out all rooms. Other than that she recalls no specific incidents of real danger.

Although the family was briefly dispersed at the end of the war, they managed to reunite shortly. Brigitte's father did not become a prisoner of war. He had never wanted to join the army, but was conscripted. To make his life as a soldier less horrible than it could have been, he'd joined the cavalry because he loved horses. He spent most of his time in Romania, training Romanian soldiers. Having to do this troubled him greatly. Brigitte's father rejoined his family in 1945. Brigitte still remembers his return in a horse-drawn cart after the war. He had survived a shot through the head by disobeying orders and removing his helmet. The bullet went through behind his ear and out his neck – if he'd kept the helmet on, the bullet would have ricocheted and not been able to exit.

The reunited family ended up in another part of Germany, in the city of Goettingen, far from their original home. In Goettingen many members of the large family clan were already staying with Brigitte's grandmother, all of them in one apartment. Brigitte's grandparents had turned their "*Wintergarten*" (i.e., conservatory) into a bedroom, while Brigitte's family lived in the kitchen. The living arrangements were terribly crowded. Adding to the family's difficulties, Brigitte's father was unable to find work, other than a post as a night-watchman and a side line of skinning cats for museums. He thought that emigration might improve their chances. Brigitte's parents had heard or read about Canada, and decided they should go there. Brigitte remembers their decision to move to Canada as a glimpse of hope and a new beginning for the whole family. She did not feel a sense of belonging in Goettingen, and looked forward to leaving for Canada.

In 1952, when Brigitte was twelve years old, the family left to start a new life in Canada. The seven-day voyage was a terrible experience. Brigitte refers to it as

Viehverkehr – cattle transport – the very term that is often used to describe the transport of Jews to the Third Reich's extermination camps. Brigitte so strongly remembers being very sick, and the sickening smell on the boat, that it still brings back memories of the voyage today. After landing in Quebec City, the family travelled across Canada by train and ended up in Alberta. They originally had been on their way to British Columbia, but on the train the immigration officer told them that there were no jobs to be had there and that they shouldn't go that far. They stayed in Alberta instead, in the small town of Northmark.

In Northmark, a town with a little shack as a railroad station, they found themselves in a "pioneer kind of situation." Brigitte's parents ended up working on a farm where the family lived at first. However, they soon realized that they couldn't afford to pass the winter there without any winter clothes or money, so they headed to Grand Prairie, where Brigitte's father got a job fixing up a house in which they could live rent-free. Eventually he found work as a butter maker and bought the house with a one-dollar down payment. Brigitte lived in Northmark for several years, and went to primary school there. The family later moved to Edmonton, where she attended high school.

Brigitte was extremely shy and withdrawn while she was growing up. In part this was the result of not having the new language at her disposal, and being in a completely strange country. She experienced a general feeling of displacement and insecurity. Being uncomfortable in her skin was a feeling that lasted all through high school. Upon graduation, Brigitte wanted to study art and to get away from home. She left for Vancouver with a friend and worked at a library. In Vancouver she met her future husband, who was also German.

Brigitte had known pretty much all along that she was going to be an artist, in part because her grandmother, who still was in Germany, had sent her art lessons to do by mail. Although Brigitte did not really follow these lessons through in a

disciplined manner, she knew then that this was what interested her. Brigitte is not the only artist in her family. Her father is still a practising ceramicist, as he had been in Germany, and he taught Brigitte's mother as well. In their eighties now, both her parents still work in their studio every day. When Brigitte decided to get married, she made it clear to her husband that she was going to go back to school once they'd had their children. And that was exactly what she did. After the birth of their children, her husband was transferred from Vancouver to Toronto where Brigitte started her art studies at Sheridan College. When her husband was transferred again, this time to Montreal, she went to Concordia University and studied Fine Arts. At Concordia she obtained a bachelor's degree in Fine Arts in 1976, and subsequently a Master's degree in sculpture in 1982.

Brigitte acquired Canadian citizenship together with her husband at twenty-one years of age. In Canada she says she does not feel German, in part because she has no German friends. Although she is fluent in German, she hasn't spoken German in Canada for years, not even with her former husband. Already as a child in Canada, she tried not to talk about her German background. She thinks that this probably was more of a personal decision, rather than anything that anybody did or said to her, as she does not remember any specific incidents of being picked on for being German. Brigitte considers the feeling of not wanting to say that she is German part of her history, and believes that is why she is now working with the subject of the Third Reich.

Over the years Brigitte sought out opportunities to live in Germany on several occasions. In 1986 and 1987 she spent two summers in Cologne. She wanted to experience the city as an artist, but also wanted to see what it was like to live in Germany, to be more than just a tourist. During her stays in Germany, Brigitte felt like an outsider, although she was not made to feel that way. On the one hand she felt very familiar and very much at home. But at the same time she

realized that she wasn't "really" German; it was a realization that produced a very contradictory feeling. Brigitte grew up with German as her first language but now she has to negotiate English and French as well, and finds that she has a hard time with both languages, probably because she was old enough to find language difficult when she came to Canada. She feels at home in no language completely, though going back to Cologne helped her German.

In 1998 and 1999, Brigitte also spent some time in Berlin. During her second, two-month stay, she did research at the library every day, which really opened up a whole other world for her. Although, over the years, she had always tried to keep up her reading in German, Brigitte now had a different connection to her first language. She's come to realize how specific language is, how it changes your whole way of looking at things. During her stays in Germany, she was amazed by how she could just enjoy the beauty of the language in and for itself.

Brigitte continues to experience feelings of both belonging and being an outsider in Germany. Her sense of belonging in Canada is off-centre as well. She wishes that she could come from a small town in Ontario, with white picket fences, because that was the idea she had of being Canadian. Even though Berlin is near her place of birth, Brigitte has never gone back to her childhood home near Magdeburg. She fears that such a return might not match her early memories. However, despite her fears of disappointment, she thinks that she will go back some day.

When she was a child, Brigitte's parents did not speak to her about the war. Her father absolutely refused to talk about it. He said it brought up too many horrible memories. But now as an adult, Brigitte can ask her parents questions. What has helped is that her daughter in Toronto is writing a book, a novel, based on the experience of being German. Her daughter interviewed her parents and that prompted them to write things down. Brigitte feels that she is not good at posing

questions or instigating discussion, because of her nature, but she thinks that this reluctance to speak is a generational attitude too. She believes that her daughter has a much easier time and is investigating the family history much better than she herself ever could. Brigitte is glad for that, because in a sense her daughter is doing it for her.

Brigitte's knowledge about Germany's role in the war came only through schooling. At the beginning she thought that her father did not want to talk about the war because of his own horrible experiences during the war, and not because of actual guilt or of simply being German. But her thoughts changed after she read history books on the subject. Brigitte does not recollect the first time the Holocaust entered her consciousness. Although she tried to pinpoint the time, it doesn't come to mind as a specific moment. To Brigitte it almost feels as if her knowledge of the Holocaust was always there, even though she does not remember how it got there; even if at her home it wasn't spoken about, it was there. Brigitte has been living with a Jewish man for eleven years now which has brought the subject of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust into the open and forced her to deal with, think about, and talk about it.

Since completing her professional training as a visual artist, and establishing herself as an artist, Brigitte has exhibited her work locally in Montreal, as well as nationally and internationally. She is best known for her large-scale installation work, and the paintings she produces in series that are usually exhibited as coherent narrative installations. Despite the sometimes obvious links in her work to German history, press commentaries do not refer to her work in this context. Instead she is habitually referred to as a Canadian, or Quebec artist. Rarely does a writer make reference to her German roots or her early upbringing in Germany.

Analysis of Works

In the work Brigitte produced during this span of nearly twenty years, there are countless aspects and commonalities that encouraged me to locate her art within the context of second-generation German visual art. For the purpose of this project, I concentrate my discussion on three of Radecki's works: *Sand Columns*, an installation on exhibition at the Musée d'Art Contemporain in Montreal in 1983; *Reading between the Lines*, a multimedia exhibition shown by Galerie Christiane Chassay in 2000, and Brigitte's most recent series of six large-scale paintings entitled *Burned Poems*, which is scheduled to be on view in Erfurt, Germany in 2003, and which was exhibited at Galerie Christiane Chassay in Montreal in the fall of 2002. Although in all three cases I analyze the exhibits at large, in the case of the latter two exhibitions, I further focus the discussion on select canvasses.

Sand Columns

The first body of work that seemed relevant to my project is Radecki's large-scale installation *Sand Columns*, which she executed between 1980 and 1982 (fig. 2.1). It was her first solo exhibition and took place at the Musée d'Art Contemporain in Montreal in 1983. Although I did not see *Sand Columns* installed, I was able to view the piece in catalogues and on slides, and had it described in detail by the artist. Additional information on the construction of the structure was culled from a *Montreal Gazette* article written by Lawrence Sabbath.¹⁸

The documentation of the *Sand Columns* shows a vast exhibition site that features a kind of labyrinth made of huge, monolithic columns. There are eight columns altogether, four on each side of the space, displayed in a staggered fashion

¹⁸ Lawrence Sabbath, "Complex 'Colonnes' Stirs Deep Emotional Responses," *Montreal Gazette*, 5 February 1983.

which, to the viewer entering the room, makes them appear to move towards a vanishing point in the distance. They are accompanied by four interlocking identical squares to their right, which gives the piece a compositional balance. The artist has made the columns by hand, using mainly fibreglass cloth and cement. The columns are held in place by wedges set into blocks. Visible on first sight, the outside of the columns appear to be made of solid cement. But the inside of the columns – they are indeed open structures – shows a different, rougher surface. The artist has made the interior surfaces of sand, and their coloration – red, yellow, black, and gold – comes from the artist's use of natural materials in their construction, such as yellow ochre and iron oxide. In part the sand has detached itself from the columns and run onto the floor, confirming that they are not as solid as they appear on first view. Radecki added another element by installing mirrors throughout the exhibition site, which lends the entire exhibit a sense of disorientation. From no vantage point can the whole installation be seen all at once, but instead the viewer has to walk around and through it in order to discover its potential meanings. With regards to the purpose of the mirrors in *Sand Columns*, Radecki explains:

A big thing at the time was the mirror: to double what you were seeing, making uncertain what you were seeing, so that it would be a disorienting experience in a sense, and so that it took time to discover the piece. In other words, I wanted the viewer to not see the whole thing all at once and know what it was about – it would be an experience in time, where you would walk around it and through the piece and discover it. These were certainly death-like passages, graves.

A lot of Radecki's work has come from her travels. Before the construction of *Sand Columns*, she had visited prehistoric sites in England and Scotland by sailboat, in an excursion organized for artists. Visually and metaphorically, she constructed *Sand Columns* from that experience, specifically from her visit to the English village Skara Brae, where she saw the archaeological remains of dwellings from 5,000 years

ago. In the interview, this was how Radecki described the labour-intensive working process she used to construct the piece:

There was this tediousness and obsessive quality about the work which I am now involved with as well. I'd be working with these little scraps of fibreglass cloth, dip them in cement, wring them out, place them layer over layer over layer, so that the work was constructed in a way that I personally could take apart and put together again without a problem.

By requiring the viewer to spend a lot of time on their discovery of *Sand Columns*, Radecki links the viewing process to the large amount of time it took her to construct the piece, thus clearly highlighting the importance of the aspect of time and its passage within the piece.

In *Sand Columns*, the viewer is coaxed into becoming an active part of the exhibition: by moving in and around the columns, the audience is crucial in the construction of the piece's meaning. The mirrors make the viewing of the work a disorienting and involving experience, further implicating the audience by confronting them with their own reflection. There is little room for bystanders, only active participants are able to view the installation and discover its potential meaning. By participating in the disorienting installation, the audience faces the uncomfortable aspects of *Sand Columns*: what on first sight appears solid turns out to be fragile, perhaps even dissolving. It's a piece that has links to a faraway past but includes modern elements in its construction; as an exploration of history, the work ensures a disorienting experience for the viewer. Part of the disorientation may arise from very subtle references to Germany's war-time past.

A *Montreal Gazette* article from 1983 indicates that the Third Reich may be an underlying theme in *Sand Columns*. Columnist Lawrence Sabbath notes in his article that the forms in *Sand Columns* are reminiscent of a stall shower, or even an upright coffin.

A quick description of one form might be a stall shower, or even an upright coffin, but immediately that analogy changes radically because of the highly innovative and artistic way Radecki has

conceived and worked the metaphorical contents, without being literal.

A stall shower might be regarded as a reference to the Auschwitz gas chambers, where shower stalls delivered deadly gas. An upright coffin evokes the same history, since concentration camp inmates were lured or forced into these illusionary showers. But Radecki appears either unaware or unafraid of these disquieting links to Germany's past, a position that is made evident by her reply to Sabbath in the same article.

The piece is not intended to resemble coffins or to be menacing. My three children aren't scared. They lived with the work for two years and they're too adventurous to be frightened. To me they're caves, though more like passage-graves that are found in parts of Scotland and England, burial places with long aisles separated by stones and the bodies divided by compartments.¹⁹

Even if Radecki rejects an explicit reference to the Holocaust, she acknowledges that burial sites served as her inspiration. Although the installation sites may be inhabited not only by the gallery audience, but also by the dead, their spirits may be considered participants of the living, human community. They are not there to scare us, but in order to be given a place in which to reside. According to Lawrence Sabbath, *Sand Columns* "arouses deep emotional responses, an aspect foreign to many installations which tend to be based on intellectual considerations. As well, these larger-than-life columns stir vestigial memories with their atavistic touches and haunting hints of primordial man and time."²⁰

In *Sand Columns*, Radecki uses an architectural and archaeological approach in order to address issues of belonging versus displacement, past versus present, memory versus forgetting. Sand columns are impermanent architectural structures, used in the construction of sand castles. They momentarily give us the

¹⁹ Sabbath, "Complex 'Colonnes.'"

²⁰ Sabbath, "Complex 'Colonnes.'"

illusion of shelter and belonging, both in space and in time. However, a sand castle also connotes a dream that remains unfulfilled, an impermanent possibility. A sand column provides us with an oxymoron: a column is built to hold up a structure via its strength, but that's impossible for a column built of sand. Metaphorically speaking, the Third Reich was a structure built upon sand columns. Or rather, the history of the Third Reich refuses to stay solid – Hitler's dream-turned-nightmare of a final solution is still dissolving the ground under Germany's feet. It appears that the ability to put together and dismantle the piece on her own gives the artist a sense of control over the past, which is particularly important in view of her native country's conflicted history:

I could lift each piece by myself and yet, when put together, it was this monumental installation. At first the columns seemed like monuments, because they were closed off and appeared to be solid. They were, in fact, the opposite: when you walked around them you could see that they were open, and their surface sand, and the sand was coming down on the floor.

In view of Brigitte's personal background, *Sand Columns* may refer to the loss of her own sense of permanence and belonging as well as to that of an entire people.

Reading between the Lines

The second of Brigitte Radecki's works under discussion is her first exhibition that has a direct reference to Nazi Germany and the disenfranchising of German Jews. The multimedia exhibition *Reading between the Lines* was shown at Galerie Christiane Chassay in the spring of 2000. It is the first of Radecki's in which she deliberately "came out as a German."

Reading between the Lines consists of three painted works and two textual elements. The first of the textual elements is a poster that features the names of hundreds of authors who were banned by the Nazis in Germany during the 1930s. The second textual element is a photograph of an open book, showing a page with

a German poem by Else Lasker-Schüler, a German-Jewish writer whose name appears on the poster as well, and the poem's English translation. Because Else Lasker-Schüler features prominently not only in *Reading between the Lines* but also in *Burned Poems*, Radecki's latest body of work, a brief discussion of the author's life is called for.

Else Lasker-Schüler is an important German-Jewish poet of the twentieth century. She was born in Germany in 1869 as the daughter of a German-Jewish banker. Her most recognized works are her lyrical, expressionist poems. She was also known for her watercolours, which often accompanied her published poems. Her first poems were published in 1899, and in 1932 she was awarded the Kleist prize, a prestigious award for German authors. She had been living and writing successfully in Berlin for many years when she was forced to emigrate to Switzerland in 1933, due to the rise of the Nazi party and the consequent banning of the work of Jewish German writers. After unsuccessful attempts to become a citizen of Switzerland, she was finally forced to emigrate to Israel, where she spent the remainder of her life impoverished, missing her native country and mourning the loss of her language. Else Lasker-Schüler died in Jerusalem in 1945, two years after the publication of her last collection of poems entitled *My Blue Piano*. At the height of her career as a German writer, Lasker-Schüler was regarded as a ground-breaking German poet by many of her peers. The Nazi banning of her books and her expulsion from Germany temporarily forced her work into oblivion, but today Lasker-Schüler has been reinstated as an important figure in the history of German literature.

The German handwriting of Else Lasker-Schüler is inaccessible to the average gallery goer and Radecki's use of the now obsolete German Sütterlin script in her copy of Lasker-Schüler's handwriting on canvas makes the text even more opaque to most viewers. (Sütterlin was a common form of handwriting in

pre-World War II Germany, discouraged by the military occupation in post-war Germany, because it was legible only to Germans and made censorship of written communication by Germans difficult.) In other words, by using a language that is mostly unreadable in the Canadian context, Radecki is examining the problem of censorship and readability. Radecki has been interested in calligraphic abstraction for several years. The small-scale gestures she is working with in the painted components of *Reading between the Lines* originate in handwriting or calligraphy. Claiming that her "scribbling" is not meant to be read or deciphered by her audience, Radecki seeks instead, in conjunction with the title of the exhibit, to set off a chain of associations in the viewer which in turn will generate meaning. Of the three paintings, all of which feature samples and fragments of Else Lasker-Schüler's handwriting, the largest one is *Sanatorium Agra*, an oil painting from 1998 (fig. 2.2). Across the canvas Radecki has enlarged an illegible excerpt from a handwritten letter by Else Lasker-Schüler. The general surface of the canvas is of a dark, nearly black coloration, whereas the handwriting is copied in red. At regular intervals are painted black slashes that appear wound-like and resemble incisions in the canvas itself. Radecki has further reversed the figure-ground relationship by painting the background around and in between the handwriting and slashes. This part of her process is carried out with very small brush strokes that become visible only at certain angles of light. This manner of working is very important to Radecki, as she describes in her artist statement for *Reading between the Lines*:

The seemingly quick and spontaneous lines are, in fact, produced through a very slow and painstaking technique of filling in the spaces between the lines with very small brushes – that is through several layers of paint that is always applied only to the edge of the line, leaving the line as negative space between "islands" of small gestures. This process undermines traditional assumptions about the production of gestural abstraction and yet allows me to express

myself individually and emotionally in our increasingly technological world.²¹

Both the impressionist slashes on the painting and the aggressive quality of the painterly marks themselves evoke the violence involved in the act of slashing. In the context of the fate of Jewish-German writers in the Third Reich, the marks simultaneously allude to the threat of actual, physical violence carried out against unwanted citizens in Nazi Germany. The near invisibility of the brushstrokes makes reference to those who suffered censorship to the extreme in the Third Reich. These individuals were mostly German Jews such as Lasker-Schüler, who, in order to save her life, had to sacrifice her writing career and flee from Germany. In *Reading between the Lines*, actual painterly violence is exerted against a body of work through the cuts painted on the canvas. The body of work stands for the body of the author. In Else Lasker-Schüler's life, violence was threatened against her body by the Nazi persecution of German Jews, and violence was exerted against her existence as both a German and writer by expelling her from Germany and banning her books. Once again the time-consuming, labour-intensive process we are familiar with from *Sand Columns* was used in painting the canvasses in *Reading between the Lines*. Although Radecki is working with Else-Lasker Schüler intensively on the painterly level, she feels that this is not enough:

Lasker-Schüler was the first writer that I got caught up with – in many ways, I got caught up with her whole experience. I'm really interested in having a reason to delve more deeply into that whole issue. By reading her writings and poetry, and by dealing with them in a very, very slow and tedious way, which is my process, I feel it gives me something like a bridge or some kind of rooting. To me the way that I'm literally repeating the writing, the handwriting, is a way of getting closer, because it's such a personal thing, and the labour-intensive aspect of it is important as well, as all the while I am thinking about her.

²¹ Artist statement by Brigitte Radecki, courtesy of the artist.

Within the exhibit itself, detailed information about Lasker-Schüler is not accessible to the audience. In fact, the statement provided by Galerie Christiane Chassay in 2000 simply refers to the writer as “a female author whose name appears on the poster bearing hundreds of names of authors banned by the Nazis in Germany during the 1930s.” In *Reading between the Lines* a narrative is constructed around three painted works and two textual elements of historical significance. The gallery’s statement also suggests a possible reading of the installation:

Perhaps, by incorporating the stories of oppressed voices such as Lasker-Schüler’s into her own work, Radecki tilts a light into overlooked aspects of our history. Her juxtaposition of unorthodox methodology with handcrafted fabrication acknowledges the validity of painting while simultaneously questioning many of its accepted authoritative tenets. Brigitte Radecki does not take the fashionable position that history and painting are dead. Instead, she reads between the lines of our official histories to expand awareness of our past, of our identity, of who we really are.²²

It appears that through her painterly re-incarnation of a long-dead Else Lasker-Schüler, Radecki returns to the poet some of what was taken from her in life: the right to be heard – or read – and an appropriate place. Radecki gives Lasker-Schüler voice through her paintings and re-places the poet visibly into the context out of which her work initially grew, the Germany that later expelled her. From Else Lasker-Schüler’s biographies we know that she mourned the loss of her working language until her death, even though this was the very language from which she was forcibly expelled.

When I interviewed Radecki in 2001 she explained how Else Lasker-Schüler entered her horizon as a subject for her paintings:

That was not that long ago, when I really got into the actual writing, the handwriting. I was trying to focus on what’s really important to me: being a woman artist and being German were the basic things I

²² Statement by Galerie Christiane Chassay.
 <<http://www.cam.org/~chassay/pagebrigittetexte.html>>

started with. In 1999, I started researching these writers in Berlin, and came across Else Lasker-Schüler for the first time.

When she first began her research for *Reading between the Lines*, Radecki had not intended her main subject to be a Jewish writer. Instead her focus had been authors who were writing during the period before the war. During her last stay in Berlin, in order to find appropriate writers, Radecki went to the State Library of Berlin every day, researching original letters in the department of handwritten documents:

There I was on the tenth of May, and suddenly the front doors were plastered with placards, naming all the writers who had been burned. My first thought was the surprise factor, that in Germany attention would be drawn to that date.²³ I looked at the names and that's how I first came across Else Lasker-Schüler. The exhibition evolved from that experience, and I would say that this was really my first time when I daringly came out as a German.

In her usage of the terms "daringly" and "coming out," it is apparent that Radecki is not at ease with her German background though she has struggled with it for some time, whether consciously or not. Ironically, although she is "coming out as a German" in Canada, when she is in Germany she is under the contradictory impression of not really being German. This illustrates her heritage of loss and displacement, a heritage that she shares in part with Lasker-Schüler, and which became obvious to her during her repeated stays in Germany. Radecki observed that she felt like an outsider:

I definitely felt like an outsider, that's for sure. It's not that they made me feel that way; it was a strange thing, because on the one hand I felt very familiar – I mean the air, the trees, everything felt very familiar, and very much at home; but at the same time I realized that I wasn't really German. It was a very contradictory feeling.

Reading between the Lines is a reflection on the history of an author's life that allows Brigitte to identify on several levels. She has her German background,

²³ 10 May 1933 was the day that Joseph Goebbels, in charge of propaganda in the Nazi party, had 20,000 books burnt on the Opernplatz in Berlin. These were books by authors "disliked" by the National Socialists (i.e., Jewish authors).

displacement, and loss of language through forced migration in common with Else Lasker-Schüler. It is also an exhibit by a German artist that pays homage to a German Jew. In order to pay homage, Radecki uses an elaborate, time-consuming painting process and, by coming out as a German, puts herself at risk by connecting herself to the disquieting history of Nazi Germany.

Radecki chose the title *Reading between the Lines* because, in her own words, "I like to not be strictly legible – not strictly forward but always in between. I appreciate ambiguity, the contradiction of two media at the same time, so the title seemed fitting." The title of the piece also refers to the artist's mistrust of simple binary readings of the Third Reich – for example, perpetrators/victims and similar good/evil pairs – a mistrust that she described in my interview with her. She also indicates yet another meaning of the title, which identifies the exhibit as a truth-finding mission with regards to the diffuse history of the Third Reich:

At the same time I am trying to get a sense: what do you read when you read between the lines? Do you get the truth, then? Do you get more of the truth, if you read between the lines, than if you read straightforward? After the war, all of these forbidden writers were not very well known, so the work included a kind of consciousness raising. They really were not read and talked about.

It appears that while Radecki's ability to identify with the poet has sent her on a kind of truth-finding mission in this exhibition, her risk to come out as a German is rendered worthwhile by her attempted project of consciousness raising: *Reading between the Lines* is her effort to help reinstate some missing pieces from the rupture within Germany's modern history: "The fact that they were missing, of course, interested me even more so. It made me feel all the more closer related." There is another possible link to Radecki's personal history here: through its forcible expulsion from the East of Third Reich Germany in 1945, and subsequent escape to Canada for economic reasons, her family and its history are now missing from Germany as well.

Since Radecki used the term "consciousness-raising," I asked her why detailed information on the person of Lasker-Schüler, and Brigitte's own German background, had not been made more accessible to the gallery audience. I asked her this since she recognizes that the exhibit was the first occasion where she came out as a German, and consciously engaged with the subject of Third Reich Germany:

I do respond to the questions I'm asked, I'm not deliberately refusing to give out this information. But at the same time, if it doesn't somehow come from the work, I would have been uncomfortable. Yet I know that this doesn't happen easily, so there is always that dilemma about it. And yet, at the same time, I feel uncomfortable about "filling in the lines," let's say, if they're not in the painting.

German born Lasker-Schüler lost her language because of her enforced emigration to Israel. She never adapted to Israel. She suffered not only from displacement, but, as a writer, she suffered particularly from loss of language. There is a clear parallel to Radecki's own relationship to language, and its loss. In fact, Brigitte claimed in the interview that she herself does not really have an auditory memory, that her memory is much more visual instead. With regards to the ambiguity of her subject in *Reading between the Lines*, she adds:

Maybe I wasn't ready yet to say it verbally. Maybe it's easier to do work, visual work, still, than to verbally state it. But there is also always what people bring to the work that adds to it. I think that's what makes it really valuable. I love to talk to people who bring things to my work that I'm not even aware of at all. That's partly what it's all about, the conversations we have, which the work hopefully set up.

Through her identification with Lasker-Schüler on the one hand, while never losing sight of the obvious difference that the poet was German-Jewish and an actual victim of Nazi perpetrators, Radecki finds a link to the past that allows her to explore her own conflicted relationship to Germany's Third Reich and her own family history, and to share it bit by bit with her audience:

This had never occurred to me before: that a Jewish woman-and that's how I saw her – should have these feelings of longing for Germany, feelings of homelessness, and wanting to be there. That was

foreign to me, was strange to me, but it was so touching. It was quite a revelation.

Radecki encourages her audience to read between the lines – not only in order to see Lasker-Schüler in her double role as important German poet and expatriated Jew, but in all the other complexities that marked her life and times. Simultaneously, the memory of Lasker-Schüler is reinscribed by Radecki, who attempts to give the poet the voice and space she deserves, in the context of both German painting and writing.

As an artist who has made the decision to consciously engage with a subject matter that may provide her with what she considers a missing link, in the history of her native country but also in her personal life, Brigitte cannot help reflecting on why it has taken her so long to touch upon a subject that is of such great importance to her. When I ask her about it, she said that she took so much time:

Because we're further away from it, I suppose – that's kind of the obvious answer. I think I was really just dealing with a lot of other things first: having kids, the general practicalities of life didn't leave that much room for reflection; but also the daring aspect of dealing with a difficult subject. It took me a long time to even admit – well, I still don't say freely – I'm German. There was always inherently that kind of shame about it, and trying to bypass it, or to not directly talk about it.

Radecki believes that what makes it easier for her to approach such difficult subject matter as an artist is the fact that the painterly language is more ambiguous than the written language. But she also realizes, on the other hand, that perhaps the very ambiguity of painting has inspired her to work with writers, artists who would be dealing with such difficult subject matter in a more direct, verbal way.

In *Reading between the Lines*, the topic of the Third Reich came up “blatantly” in Radecki's work for the first time, although on the personal level it had been present for much longer. For years Brigitte felt that she did not have the right or know how to deal with this topic in a competent and sensitive way, while allowing her art to still be art. Although Radecki did not want her art to function as

only a political statement, she still felt that she had to “come out” as a German in order to deal with this history. In her correspondence with a curator, Radecki writes that *Reading between the Lines* set up a situation in which the writings and memory of a German-Jewish woman would collide with her own memories and personal questions.

In other words, I hope most of all to be changed myself by dealing with this rather than to change other people. I also hope that it will resonate with people who are neither Jewish nor German.²⁴

The Burnt Poems

Radecki's most recent series of paintings was at first called *The Burnt Poets*. Six of the large-scale canvasses are scheduled for an exhibition in Erfurt, Germany in 2003. I first viewed the paintings in the artist's studio in 2001, while some of them were still in progress. They have since been shown at Galerie Christiane Chassay in Montreal, in the fall of 2002. During the interview Brigitte voiced her concerns about her preliminary working title *Burnt Poets*, as she feared its hurtful potential:

I had taken the series' title from a book called *Die verbrannten Dichter*, the burned poets. But when you say it out loud like that it starts to sound as if it were the burnt bodies of humans, and I don't want that. I think I might change it to “burnt words,” or something similar.

In this series of eight-by-eight-feet oil and acrylic paintings on canvas, Radecki once again works with the texts of Else Lasker-Schüler, but branches out to include one work by Irmgard Keun, a non-Jewish German woman writer, in her task to produce paintings about writers who were persecuted and whose books were burned in Nazi Germany. In *The Burnt Poems*, the canvasses are inspired by specific poems and their titles are taken directly from the poems' titles. In comparison to the

²⁴ Letter to curator, courtesy of the artist.

ambiguous character of *Reading between the Lines*, this body of work is a much more direct illustration of the writers' works. What the two exhibits have in common is Radecki's obsession with the time-consuming, labour-intensive, and painstaking process that has been part of her artistic practice since the early *Sand Columns*.

One of the paintings in this series is entitled after one of Lasker-Schüler's best known poems, *My Blue Piano*, which was first published in Jerusalem in 1943 in Lasker-Schüler's last publication of poems by the same name.

Mein blaues Klavier

*Ich habe zu Hause ein blaues Klavier
Und kenne doch keine Note,*

*Es steht im Dunkel der Kellertür,
Seitdem die Welt verrohte.*

*Es spielen Sternenhände vier
– Die Mondfrau sang im Boote –
Nun tanzen die Ratten im Geklirr.*

*Zerbrochen ist die Klaviatur.....
Ich beweine die blaue Tote.*

*Ach liebe Engel öffnet mir
– Ich aß vom bitteren Brote –
Mir lebend schon die Himmelstür –
Auch wider dem Verbote.²⁵*

In her poem, Else Lasker-Schüler mourns the losses inflicted upon her by Nazi Germany (Klüsener 126). This English translation of the German original poem appeared in the *Hebrew Ballads* in Philadelphia in 1980: ²⁶

²⁵ Klüsener, Erika. *Lasker-Schüler*. (Reinbek: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH, 1980), 126.

²⁶ From *Hebrew Ballads*, trans. A. Durchschlag and J. Litman-Demeestere, Philadelphia, 1980. Website on Else-Lasker-Schüler, 15 March 2003
<<http://members.aol.com/woheisch/start2.htm>>

My Blue Piano

At home I have a blue piano
But have no note to play.

It stands in the shadow of the cellar door,
There since the world's decay.
Four star-hands play harmony
– The Moon maiden sang in her boat –
Now the rats dance janglingly.

Broken is the key board...
I weep for the blue dead.

Ah, dear angel, open to me
– What bitter bread I ate –
Even against the law's decree,
In life, heaven's gate.

I much prefer another English translation I was given by Radecki, although it is incomplete. Brigitte obtained it from the department of handwritten documents in the State Library of Berlin. Since Lasker-Schüler was a lyricist who employed the German language to its fullest and with all its intricacies, it is difficult to render the poetry into a translation that reflects the beauty of the German original. This version comes close to capturing it:

My Blue Piano

I have at my house still a blue piano
and yet cannot play a note.
In the dark of the cellar door it stands
Since the world is filled with brutal folk.
Star-hands four are playing there
The moon-woman sang in the boat –
Now the rats are dancing in its glare.
The keyboard is broken beyond repair...
I weep for the blue departed.

Radecki's *My Blue Piano*, painted in 2000, is almost entirely painted in shades of blue (fig. 2.3). Once again it features Lasker-Schüler's cursive handwriting. This time, however, Brigitte has very much enlarged the handwriting. In comparison to the script on the canvasses in *Reading between the Lines*, the enlargement of the handwriting now makes the work appear much more gestural. In the earlier *Sanatorium Agra*, painted slashes interrupted Lasker-Schüler's

handwriting. In a similar fashion to the distribution of the slashes in that piece, a rudimentary rendering of a piano keyboard is distributed across the surface of *My Blue Piano*, once again disrupting the author's writing. While most of the piano keys are a bluish-black, select keys feature red paint as well. The keys are paired in groups of threes, and are horizontally distributed in equal distances across the entire rectangular canvas. In fact, Radecki purposely distributed the piano keys across the painting's surface in such a rigid pattern, in order to make it appear as if they were marching across the surface of the canvas. The more gestural appearance of the copied writing verifies the fact that, as a painter, Radecki is involved with another form of language altogether than Lasker-Schüler: the abstract painterly language.

The colour blue featured importantly in the work of Else Lasker-Schüler and was very meaningful to her, and many have drawn a comparison between Lasker-Schüler's poetry and expressionistic painting. Most of the canvasses in the *The Burnt Poems* series feature strong, vivid colours. Although in a sense they are illustrations of poems, they are not painted in a straightforward narrative, representational manner. Radecki points out that she is using more or less accepted abstract vocabulary in order to illustrate the poems or the words. She elaborates on her working process:

What you don't see is that there is a kind of three-dimensional handwriting across the surface, which is just done with medium, put on with a syringe. There is a lot that you don't see on the slide: texture, kind of hairy stuff or medium. I'm always working in between layers.

Radecki is working "in between layers" not only in her art but in her personal life as well. She is striving to include material or content that is not easily apparent to the audience, such as the use of medium applied with a syringe, which adds another layer of meaning. It appears that the inclusion of another German poet in *The Burnt Poems*, which otherwise utilizes poems by Else Lasker-Schüler

only, allows Brigitte to find a place in between layers, and in between victims and perpetrators, in her search for truth and missing links. One of the canvasses, entitled *After Midnight*, is inspired by German poet Irmgard Keun. Radecki explains how she decided to include a piece on another writer in her work on banned authors in the Third Reich, which up to that point focused exclusively on Else Lasker-Schüler:

I thought it would be interesting to contrast her with another writer, and to see what happens I did this work on Irmgard Keun. She's a bit younger than Lasker-Schüler, another generation. She wrote during the thirties, emigrated and only died in 1980. She's much more ironic and "*witzig*" (humorous, funny). Her writing is very different, and it's amazing how aware she was of what was going on at that time. Her writing is absolutely incredible, very tough.

Irmgard Keun was born in Berlin in 1905, the daughter of a German salesman. She was a best-selling author in Germany before the rise of the Nazi party. Her novels, which had a tendency towards satire and social criticism, were put on the Nazis' black list in 1933. In 1935 Irmgard Keun dared to sue the Prussian government for damages because of the confiscation of her books by the Gestapo. Soon after she left Germany for Belgium out of fear of persecution, and later moved to the Netherlands. She returned to Germany in the 1940s with a fake passport, and lived through the intensive bombings of Cologne by the allied forces. Keun is quoted as having said "I was happy about every bomb that fell, the fear came later."²⁷ She died in Cologne in 1982. During the interview Radecki elaborated on Keun's biography: "She also felt that she didn't have a home anywhere. She ended up very poor just like Else Lasker-Schüler."

For a moment it became unclear to whom Radecki was referring, herself or Irmgard Keun, and whether she was linking Keun to Lasker-Schüler or herself. During the interview Brigitte explained that she does not have a true sense of

²⁷ Website on Irmgard Keun: <http://www.altenforst.de/intnat/engl/e_keun.htm>

belonging anywhere because of her refugee past. Brigitte's family lost everything in fleeing their estate in Germany and emigrating to an insecure economic future in Canada. Brigitte appears to be linking her own lived knowledge of such a difficult past to the experiences of Irmgard Keun. In her painting *After Midnight*, Radecki illustrates a poem entitled *Die Reihendurchbrecherein* – the girl who breaks through the lines – which appears in a story from Keun's book *Nach Mitternacht* (After Midnight). Radecki summarizes the narrative as follows:

The poem tells the story of a little girl who was trained by her parents to hand the *Führer* a *Fliederstrauss* (lilac bouquet) – I'm switching languages while I'm talking; I usually don't do that, it's because I'm talking about a very specific thing: writing. The little girl, she was trained to break through the ranks and hand the *Führer* this *Fliederstrauss*, because he liked to be photographed with children. She recites this poem, which her father has written: "*Ich bin ein deutsches Mädel*" (I'm a German maiden) etc., and suddenly she drops dead.

When I saw *After Midnight* in Radecki's studio, it was still unfinished (fig. 2.4). The general coloration of the canvas surface features a sickly greenish-yellow, across which excerpts from the handwriting of Irmgard Keun are horizontally distributed in white. Thin, black painterly marks are once again distributed horizontally across the canvas at regular intervals, disrupting the author's handwriting. Horizontally from the left, the black shadow of the lilac bouquet expands into the canvas centre, where it culminates in an oblong, pitch-black shape, reminiscent of the kind of speech-bubbles featured in comic books – except that it does not display words, but rather appears to swallow them. From the central shape, or speech-bubble, a few, leaf-like black shapes expand onto the canvas, threatening to spurt further growth and to obliterate more of the words. Radecki's rendition of a lilac bouquet is a dark shadow that resembles a cut-out from black construction paper, except for its few, extremely thin stems on the left side of the canvas. Both visually and metaphorically, in the context of Brigitte's subject matter, the lilac bouquet functions as a huge, gaping black hole.

In my view, this is the most interesting work of the series, because it articulates Radecki's specific conflict as a second-generation German visual artist working with the subject of the Third Reich. The title of the poem source for this painting may be literally translated into something akin to "breaking through the lines." The little girl in the story is doomed either way. If she breaks through the lines of spectators and gives the lilac bouquet to Hitler, she will drop dead. That is how the poem ends. If, however, she breaks through the lines of Nazi Germans by not complying, she is doomed as well. I sense that, in choosing this poem as the source for a painting in a series of works that specifically deal with Jewish-German Lasker-Schüler, Radecki provides us with a hint to her own dangerous position as a non-Jewish, second generation German visual artist. She is attempting to break through the lines of what is the established and largely accepted history of the Third Reich, a history that is largely based on a simple binary system of victim and perpetrator. On the one hand Brigitte wants to search in between the lines of the history of Nazi Germany, on the other hand she is concerned that she may not have the right to do so:

This is what makes it difficult for me to even speak about it – because I don't think it's even possible, for one to image that, or to even speak about that indirectly; and least of all I barely feel I have a right to do that; and how do you do it, then? How do you approach it at all? So that's a big dilemma, still is. I still don't know if, philosophically, I'm doing the right thing.

This is a major dilemma Radecki and other second-generation German visual artists are facing in approaching the past, in their moves from unconscious to more conscious processes of artistic practice. Although Brigitte is involved in artistic processes that attempt to show respect to the victims of the Third Reich, while actively working to deal with her own conflicted past with regards to Nazi Germany, the question remains whether such work may have the desired effect, or can even be viewed in a positive light by her audience:

I'm not feeling like a victim at all. I don't feel so much like a perpetrator though, either. I think that it was Galloway who said: only the victims are allowed to create memorials or monuments, not the perpetrators; and so the question is: this is obviously not a monument, but is it a memorial of some kind that I'm dealing with in my art? I think it's more fluid than a monument or even a memorial, but at the same time my question remains: am I allowed to do that? Is it my right? Do I have the right? How will it be looked at by the people who are the victims?²⁸

The art practice of second-generation German visual artists balances on a precarious tightrope: attempting to balance readability with the avoidance of overt political statements, balancing compassion for the victims with the mourning of personal losses, balancing a fragile, even hidden identity as Germans with a need to come out in order to approach deeply troubling issues in Germany's past. Radecki, at least, feels that she has no choice in dealing with the subject matter: "It's the last generation that really has direct experience and yet is not that much a part of it as our parents were. It is our duty, in a sense."

When we were discussing the installation of *The Burnt Poems*, the issue of Radecki's work's accessibility to a general audience came up once again, as it did in the discussion of *Reading between the Lines*. Radecki was still debating how to make the context out of which the work arose accessible to the audience, whether she should supply handouts, or give visitors the option of referring to the original sources behind the paintings:

I'm facing a bit of a dilemma because I want the paintings to stand on their own, but at the same time I would like to, in a sense, "give the dead a voice," by making people conscious of these writers and their work. I'm sort of striving for clarification. Of course, I'm always stuck with that old interest of not wanting to be pure – purely in one medium, pure in anything. That's the dilemma I'm facing, but at the same time I want something focused to happen.

Whereas *Sand Columns* appeared to provide some early subconscious links to the history of Nazi Germany, Radecki's decision to come out as a German in

²⁸ Peter Galloway said this at the "Memory and Archive" conference in Montreal in 2000.

Reading between the Lines clearly shows her first conscious effort to deal with the subject of the Third Reich, even though the setting and painterly process still leave the subject ambiguous to the viewer. Radecki continues her conscious effort more directly in her subsequent series of paintings, *The Burnt Poems*, by what she considers to be a deeper delving into the subject, and by supplying her audience with more detailed information on her subject. When asked what it meant to her to be a research subject in relation to both her family's German past and Germany's recent modern past, specifically with regards to the Second World War, the Third Reich, and the Holocaust, Radecki had this to say:

I think it is a very good time for that to be happening. I was thinking: how magical! How amazing that now that I feel comfortable, or more comfortable about "coming out," that you should be here and question me on this. Because maybe four years ago, or five years ago I wouldn't have been comfortable. I wouldn't even have known where to begin – I would have felt totally inadequate about it. So I do feel that there is the sense of things being in the air, and that makes me feel quite happy about it actually, relieved and excited almost. I don't even have anybody I speak German to, we have no German friends or people I speak German with at all, haven't had for years. There is that sort of missing link, or something, that I need to deal with.

Through her investigations, Radecki is able to reinstate some of the missing links to a German past that at present can be experienced only as a major rupture in history.

CHAPTER 3

Suse Rumland

Stuck Inside: A Life's Theme

Suse Rumland is the only one of the artists I interviewed who is neither a citizen nor a resident of Canada; she is also the only artist of German-Jewish heritage. Rumland lives in Steinburg, Germany, with her teenaged son, near the city of Hamburg.

I interviewed Rumland in her studio on 27 October 2002. The interview was conducted in German, which I translated. But because Rumland reads and speaks English, she was able to verify my translation. As all of Rumland's exhibitions have been in Germany, the press clippings that she made available to me were written in German – the translations here are my own.²⁹

The important factor in Rumland's story is the fact that her grandmother was Jewish. She was born in Germany around 1890, was very assimilated, and hated being Jewish. She kept her Jewish heritage a secret. Suse's father was born in 1921, and found out that he had a Jewish mother only when his father, Suse's grandfather, was forced by the Nazis to stop practising his profession in 1934. At that time, Suse's father was thirteen years old. He was still able to finish secondary school with his A-levels, the German *Abitur*, because so-called mixed marriages were still privileged and he was not forced to wear the yellow star. Because of his Jewish heritage, however, he was not allowed to study at university. Instead, through Suse's grandfather's connections and with the help of Suse's grandparents' friends, he obtained professional schooling as a businessman.

²⁹ Unless identified otherwise, all of Rumland's speech that I quote is taken from the translated and verified version of the original interview.

At the end of 1944, children from mixed marriages were ordered to work in Theresienstadt as forced labourers. Once again Suse's father obtained help through Suse's grandfather's connections. He was declared unfit for work and sent to a psychiatric ward in Kiel where he was allowed to stay, pretending he was a manic-depressive. Suse's grandparents also avoided deportation to Theresienstadt when they were hidden by friends in the country. Suse's father remained a patient in the psychiatric ward until Germany's "liberation" in the spring of 1945. Suse's parents already knew each other at that time, and Suse's mother visited her father on a daily basis. The two chiefs of medical staff, the only ones who knew his secret, were also hiding other persecuted individuals.

Suse Rumland was born in Kiel, Germany, in 1948. She is the oldest of three sisters. As a young child Suse was profoundly affected by the fact that, whenever friends visited, whether the children were present or not, her father talked about everything that happened in the concentration camps, as well as everything that would have happened to him, had he not been hidden in a psychiatric ward. Although he merely told the stories and did not show his own fear, Suse felt a fear that has terribly affected her life, although she realized this only in her early forties. Today, when it comes to the family's life in the Third Reich, Suse's family always pretends that nothing really happened. Suse carried that contradictory story with her for a very long time. Nothing was the matter, and yet everything was different – there was always a sense of doubling, of living in two worlds. Suse's parents are still alive. A few years ago, she interviewed her father about the war times. This discussion was extremely important for her, as it allowed her a kind of separation from her father's story, which had not seemed possible when she was a child.

Suse's parents are baptized Christians. Suse does not belong to a religion today although she was raised in the Christian faith and confirmed. As a child, Suse had to attend Sunday school and still remembers some Bible stories. When she

moved out from her parents' home after finishing secondary school, she also left the church immediately. Christianity was the only religion introduced to Suse. It was only much later in life that she informed herself about Judaism.

Suse is the only artist in her family. At seventeen she started painting just for fun, when her first boyfriend gave her a box of watercolours. In part, the artistic influence had come from Suse's grandfather, who painted watercolours in the mountains whenever he was on vacation. In 1969, after secondary school, Suse started Fine Arts studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich (which is, incidentally, the art academy where Hitler had applied and was rejected). Suse studied Fine Arts for six semesters but found herself very unhappy in the academy's authoritarian structures and leftist environment of the 1960s. Consequently, she stopped her professional training as an artist, took on odd jobs, and painted just for herself again, as she had done before, creating images mostly from fantasy, essentially without a plan and almost "like another language."³⁰

After leaving the Academy of Fine Arts, Rumland obtained professional training as a social worker, finishing her studies in 1980. She worked in various psychiatric wards, and later came to believe that she made that choice in order to work through her father's history. Over the years she also worked in youth referral centres and in a women's shelter. In 1984, at thirty-six years of age, Rumland gave birth to her only son. The child's father is Jewish. She believes that it was a conscious – "unconsciously conscious" – choice to have a child with a Jewish rather than "a German man." For Rumland, the relationship with her German-Jewish partner was a vehicle for approaching the subject of Nazi Germany. In their thirteen years together, the couple experienced a lot of difficulties and separated when their child was six years old. To Rumland this was a kind of new beginning. At the time

³⁰ For Rumland, this other language seems to emerge from the subconscious, which was addressing her underlying concerns while she was unable to formulate them verbally.

she was in her early forties and had begun to deal with her Jewish German history and the influences that history had on her life. This process had already started when she met her former partner, seven years prior to the birth of her son.

Since Rumland is not Jewish, her son isn't Jewish either. Rumland never converted to Judaism because conversion is difficult and because she feels that she would have to be truly religious. She believes that her son has fewer problems with the family's conflicted past than she does, in part because he does not want to confront history. In comparison to her son, Rumland devoured whatever information she could obtain on Germany's Third Reich past at an early age. She always wanted to know, "to know without knowing how and why and what." But Rumland has also been careful not to traumatize her son the way that she was traumatized by her father and his stories. Instead, she briefly told him what happened to his grandparents, and said that he could ask questions.

After the separation from her partner, Rumland felt horrible and left alone with her child. Simultaneously, the underlying problematic of the Third Reich became very apparent for her in her art practice. Already, with the birth of her son, she had started to paint again and to exhibit her work. Although she considered exhibiting her work a necessary step for her self-development, it was also a difficult step – she was afraid to turn public and at first did not enjoy exhibiting.

After returning to her art practice and becoming aware of the underlying subject of the Third Reich, Rumland also became involved in psychodrama.³¹ Her education in psychodrama started with her attendance in a seminar entitled "Confronting the Holocaust" in Berlin, which was led by Jakob Naor, an Israeli. Jakob Naor led groups that were open to all "second generation survivors and

³¹ Participants in psychodrama dramatically act out, usually with a facilitator, various difficult lived or historical scenarios in order to psychologically work out or heal from their own role in the story.

perpetrators." The groups met two or three times a year and Rumland participated in them for several years. Once the group spent a week in Auschwitz, working psycho-dramatically. Rumland's participation in the groups was a difficult experience, especially in the beginning. As the child of both a "perpetrator" and a "victim," she "often sat immediately between two chairs," a situation that she believes she created for herself frequently. For her, as well as for the group, it was difficult to bring the two sides together. In the end the group dissolved. Participating in the group was still important for Rumland, because it enabled her to approach many issues with regards to her family history in the Third Reich, and to act them out dramatically. It was an intense experience for her, and even frightening in the beginning.

Given her German-Jewish ancestry, Rumland does not feel like a perpetrator's child. For the past ten years, she has been a member of a "two-worlds" group, a group for second-generation individuals like her who have a German and a German-Jewish parent. The group exists throughout Germany, and members meet twice yearly. It is not group therapy but exists instead to help the participants confront their conflicted legacy. At first the participants ran the group on their own, but now they have a moderator who takes on the responsibility of coordination and direction. Although Rumland cannot really say that she feels more at home in this group than in the previous one, it provides her with a glimpse of *Heimat* (homeland or native country). Because of her mixed heritage in conjunction with the history of the Third Reich, Rumland has the feeling that, in Germany, she always remains a bit outside. There are few Germans who share her heritage. But in the "two-worlds" group she is able to meet others like herself, giving her a slight sense of belonging.

Rumland is unable to call herself German, although that is effectively who she is. Something "glues" her to Germany and does not let her leave. Her actual wish is to run, but she does not know where to run. The wish has been

long-standing, but it does not have a concrete shape. Rumland believes that, as long as the wish to run remains so diffuse, she has some things to figure out in Germany. That is her explanation of why she doesn't leave. Since Germany's Third Reich did not wish for her to be born, Germany could not possibly be her place. If Nazi Germany had lasted just a bit longer, her father would have been murdered, and she would not exist. Therefore Germany could never be Rumland's country, although, in many of those things that are called German, she considers herself to be German. In her mind this conflict creates a rupture. She believes that the children of perpetrators as well as children of survivors must confront the past in order to take on a bit of the responsibility.

Rumland does not trust Germany and its process of working through the past, which she finds barely existent and mainly superficial. In Germany she perceives a conformity, an effort to get rid of difference in order to equalize. She considers this cruel. Whether this is different elsewhere Rumland does not know, because she has never lived outside of Germany, and she doesn't think that vacations are the same as living elsewhere. Being German fills her with horror and disgust. It is something that she did not choose, and never would have chosen, yet it is something that does not let go of her because she was born in Germany and grew up with its history. German identity and history are entirely entangled for Rumland, and she cannot separate the two. She is stuck between two worlds and cannot leave. Being stuck inside is her life's theme.

Rumland's art practice differs from the other artists I interviewed in that it is not her main profession. She views her art not so much as a means to make a living but as a means of survival. As an artist Rumland engages in the life-affirming practices and truth-finding missions of someone who knows the art of survival in a hostile environment – in a native country with a past that puts her very existence into question.

Rumland's studio is in her home. In fact, visually her home and her studio are not clearly separated – because her art infiltrates her life as much as her life infiltrates her art, her living and working space have no clear boundaries between one another. Her artwork is not restricted to the studio but covers the walls of her entire living space. On her studio wall, Rumland has handwritten two verses. The first is the song of an African griot, a wandering storyteller and bard: "Take a break, great river, go to sleep in the sea." Underneath Rumland has written: "Friends from hell are a very rare thing," which is a sentence by Hendrik Mandelbaum, a German Jew who was forced to shovel corpses into the ovens of Auschwitz. To Rumland, these are two verses of the same song.

On display throughout her entire apartment is her collection of odd toys, bought at local flea markets. The bathroom in particular features dozens of these "stranded" objects, which are grouped together on the ground and are visible in the plastic pockets of the transparent shower curtain. They provide Rumland with a kind of language, a space for strangeness. In Germany she feels like a stranger. So as a stranger, she needs a space for strangeness, which she creates for herself. Because the past leaves her speechless (i.e., in terms of spoken language), her art is a search for a language that will enable her to deal with the past, and a language with which to communicate with others.

Analysis of Works

Rumland's art practice is very fluid and intricately entangled with her personal life. An undated press clipping on a recent exhibition by Suse Rumland in Bad Oldesloe near Hamburg reads:

"All of my paintings have a light and a dark side. Painting puts me in a kind of trance. The paintings aren't just impressions of one summer, but also visions of fear: I inherited the fear from my father. It is real for me – and it will always be there."

The artist lives with the feelings of horror and danger that Walter Burmester, her 75-year-old Jewish father, lived with in the Third Reich, passing it on to his daughter. "My father's fate is entangled in my paintings," Suse says.³²

For the past twenty years, Rumland has exhibited her work in and around Hamburg. Her art practice includes painting, drawing, sculpture, installation, and photography. As her mode of working is very experimental, most of her work includes mixed media elements. In her paintings, Rumland uses oil as well as acrylic paint. Her painting and drawing practice employs a lot of layering, scratching, and erasing techniques. General themes in her work are layers, transparencies, groundlessness, and language. Groundlessness resurfaces frequently in the depiction of objects that appear ungrounded or floating. Transparencies appear in Rumland's use of her materials, but also in the depiction of what she considers to be "peepholes" in her work. Often working with layers, both metaphorically and technically, her more specific motifs include boats, towers, and showers.

To analyze Suse Rumland's work in the context of second generation German visual art, I will concentrate the discussion on some of her themes, rather than on specific works alone. I have attempted a general chronological sequencing of her art production. Rumland's mode of working differs from the art practice of the other artists I interviewed, as she rarely titles her work and keeps no organized files on her artistic practice. In fact, many of her press-clippings do not indicate source, author, or year. (I have attempted to include as much information as possible on the incomplete press-clippings she provided me with.)

It appears to me that, as a second-generation German artist, over the past twenty years Suse Rumland has been consistent in her attempts to find a language with which to deal with Germany's past. Rumland paints because it provides her

³² Rhode, "Doppel-Ausstellung im Rathaus [A Double Exhibit in City Hall]," *Lübecker Nachrichten*, 1996: n.p.

with another language – something she is searching for in all of her art production, but also something she has worked with in a specific body of work. While interviewing Rumland in her studio, I noticed three abandoned-looking canvasses that stood upright in a corner, produced between 1980 and 1990. According to Rumland, these early works (which she entitled *Writing*) never took on much meaning for her. Their three-dimensional plaster and paint surfaces are entirely white, with a shadow cast here and there by one of the plaster scribbles, reminiscent of written language, which Rumland had built up on their surface. The three works feature what appears to be slightly different moulded plaster languages on their surface. Rumland calls them an effort to speak and to write. When I asked her whether this triptych was an attempt to invent a language that could be understood by everyone, she replied: “A language that could be understood by all, or various languages and alphabets. And in part one that does not exist at all.” The images, despite their stark whiteness, or possibly because of it, appear to invite the viewer to close her eyes and touch their surface, thus alluding to “feeling,” both by one’s wish to touch and by the emotions that are triggered in viewing and touching the piece.

Between 1998 and 1999, Rumland has repeatedly painted images of boats, what she refers to as her general symbol for homelessness. These boats also have many other meanings. They provide security at sea and ferry us across the water, but it’s also in a boat that we enter Hades, the realm of the dead. Generally Rumland’s boats appear surreal. She has painted boats that hover in the air without a sense of direction, and boats with legs (fig. 3.1).

One of Rumland’s boat paintings from 1998 is entitled *Exodus*. It is an acrylic painting on “nettle fabric” (linen) and measures 110 by 90 centimetres. *Exodus* is painted mainly in brown and blue colours. Taking the format of a traditional landscape, the work is horizontally divided into three main sections. The bottom

section features the elongated, basic shape of a boat. The boat's name, *Exodus*, is written on its stern on the right side of the image. The middle section depicts approximately ten tree trunks, lined up in a row like a fence. Between them a brownish-blue sky is visible. On first sight, the top section of the image appears to be made up from the trees' crowns. On closer inspection, however, it becomes apparent that we are looking at a huge, dark blue cloud instead. The entire cloud is covered by either roots or veins. Near the boat's hull on the left of the painting, a large shape rises up and in front of the tree trunks. It is a vessel in the basic shape of a heart. The main artery of the heart is cut and is pointing to the left, into the same direction the boat is travelling. The heart is floating, attached to the boat by only two thin ropes.

As Rumland explained, water and clouds in her images habitually stand in for ashes, which denote Auschwitz (i.e., water metonymically refers to the showers that were killing devices in Auschwitz, ashes to the corpses burnt in the camp's crematories). The trees are painted in a way that makes them look like a giant prison from which there is no escape, a metaphor for Nazi Germany. The heart may be viewed as a symbol for those who tried to escape, while the cloud refers to the failure in their exodus. The heart's severed main artery shows that even those who might have been able to escape were cut off from their people and native country.

Rumland's boats always represent a double condition of being sheltered while also getting ahead and being in motion. They are also images of the loneliness or isolation we might experience in a small boat. Although the boats do not appear to be diminutive in her paintings, Rumland calls them nutshells – precarious vessels in constant danger of tipping over and sinking. When I asked her about the proverb, "we're all in the same boat," Rumland said:

Well, I am sitting all alone in my boat. We don't all sit together in a boat. Rather it's a worldlessness. I cannot describe it any different. My age group is essentially a normal German one. That means I grew up as was the norm, but effectively nothing was normal underneath. So I

believe that everywhere I remain outside. I am not Jewish (there is an immense rejection when you are not Jewish – here at least) but I also do not feel German, whatever that may be.

In fact, in Rumland's paintings of boats there are no figures. In Germany Suse Rumland is "worldless" because she lives between worlds, and because the world of German Jews who lived in the Third Reich has disappeared with Auschwitz. Her boats appear to be the only place that can contain that feeling of worldlessness, and provide her with a sense of security, however lonely a place they may be. Although Rumland may be "sitting all alone in her boat," she adds:

I have friends – that is how I can belong. And that has, I believe, to do with my father's story, the fact that there were always friends who would help him. I think that our family biography always enters our life's design. That's how I look at it. Friends are of ultimate importance to me, relationships. That is ultimately my definition of home – *Heimat* – if there even should be such a thing.

I suggest that it is also through her art practice that Suse Rumland creates a community or home that can provide her with a sense of belonging.

In the late 1990s Rumland produced numerous paintings on another theme; this time it was towers. These towers, rather than being prisons or fortresses, are places from which she can look "to the inside." In asking Rumland about the various themes that she has employed throughout her years as an exhibiting artist, I was especially interested in her personal dictionary. By this I mean the visual vocabulary she may have established in order to express those things that cannot be approached by her verbally, in order to make her underlying concerns apparent and ultimately decipherable. Such a dictionary can never be universal. Rather, it is understood as an artist's personal vocabulary that becomes visible over years of production. It appears that towers, like boats, have entered into Rumland's personal dictionary. She puts it this way: "Graves, look-outs, peep-holes and transparencies: an image that provides me with a look into the oven, so to speak – and towers." Metaphorically speaking, these towers function as "a kind of life-design," even

though her life has been built on the “ruins and piles of rubble” of the Third Reich. According to Rumland, another meaning is the tower of Babylon that fell apart.

In looking at Rumland’s tower images, one sees that some are more realistic while others appear quite abstract (fig. 3.2). One of the tower paintings from 1997 looks more like a space-ship than a tower. This work, simply called *Tower*, is an oil painting on “nettle fabric” (linen) and measures 40 by 60 centimetres. The vertical canvas is covered almost entirely in yellow-orange marks that have been applied in a painterly fashion. A sky-blue layer becomes visible in a thin line across the very top of the work. The tower, or spaceship, has risen from the ground of the painting, the tip of its pyramid-shaped top aligned with the upper margin of the canvas. The tower has also been worked in a painterly fashion. Its bottom half is dark, painted in purple and black. The top of the tower appears lighter, as yellow and orange have been mixed in with the darker colours. Although the tower seems to be rising upwards, it is in fact attached to the side and bottom of the canvas by a number of strings. The strings are not painted, but scratched into the thick, yellow surface of the painting, making visible some darker layers of paint underneath. The tower itself is divided into two sections. The lighter coloured, pyramid-shaped top section is attached to the canvas by only one thin string. The darker and heavier-looking bottom section is attached by many ropes. It appears to be hollow, as if the two halves would be one vessel if they were solidly attached to each other. Multiple thin lines crisscross the tower, sectioning off windows. The entire tower is covered by windows through which we are able to look to its inside. The inside of the tower has been scratched with countless little marks.

At first this looks like a hopeful painting. A tower, which looks like a spaceship, appears to be on the rise towards a thin strip of blue sky. But on second look, the tower appears to be doomed in its effort to rise, as too many strings attach it to the canvas. In light of the history of the Third Reich, the painting may denote

that escape from Nazi Germany was possible for only a lucky few. The top section could potentially sever the single rope that attaches it to the canvas, but it would have to leave its other half behind. The numerous window shapes on the painting illustrate Rumland's theme of looking, particularly looking in:

Looking in, making transparent, because I always think that this subject is so multi-faceted. I also believe that this relates to the fact that I cannot make myself understood at all, because there is no single truth here, or one path, or one history – only many stories, and especially here in Germany. It is nearly impossible to explain that history has an impact on absolutely everything. No one wants to know it, and that is what I always find so difficult. That is what makes me feel like an outsider.

Rumland's statement that there is no single truth is important when taking into account how the Third Reich was dealt with immediately after the Second World War. In a hasty effort to provide quick answers for what may have led to the Holocaust, the accounting of this history divided Third Reich Germans into Germans and Jews, into victims, perpetrators, and bystanders. Rumland calls these binary systems oversimplified structures. Her own towers, on the other hand, are the very opposite of simple structures. They illustrate the artist's effort to make a multifaceted history apparent. Rumland believes that her art may provide her with another language as a means to get around the verbal oversimplification: "My issue is language as well. That is, I paint because it provides me with another language."

Another issue that keeps reappearing in the work of Suse Rumland is groundlessness. Groundlessness is expressed in the work by scenes in which objects and subjects are displayed without being grounded in supporting structures, such as her tower that does not stand on the ground, but flies like a kite attached to ropes. In her life, as well as in her art, Rumland connects groundlessness with fear, especially the fear of what a human being is capable of: "Having no ground with regards to home [*Heimat*], but also with regards to the knowledge of what people can do. I knew this from early on. It left me without ground. Groundlessness is a main theme in my life as well. What has happened [i.e., the Holocaust] that was

groundless, not to be understood." Rumland further links her theme of groundlessness to grief, as she views history as a great mountain of grief:

There are always situations in which I could simply cry. It also provides relief, because I do not cry often. At the end of my Holocaust group I cried a lot. One is stuck with a huge mountain of grief, and some of it will always remain. I get rid of a piece here and there, but in my life it cannot be dismantled.

As much as crying as a simple act of mourning helps when confronting a great burden of grief, Rumland's art provides her with a safe space for active mourning. Even more than a work of mourning, Rumland considers her art practice to be a labour of life. As she put it, "Having a good life, mourning and living, that cannot be divided. This mixture of death and life: I see that as a riddle on the one hand, but as very clear on the other hand." This explains why, despite their deeper, darker meaning, many of Rumland's early images often feature bright, life-affirming colours. They are expressive of the artist's wish to find joy in life and her will to survive. However, when I made the suggestion during my studio visit that the joy of beautiful things seems immediately apparent in all of her work – while still allowing for her persistent double perspective, the theme of life and death – she replied that this may be the case in many of her paintings and drawings, but was definitely not the case in her installation piece in the exhibition *Emergency*.

Emergency

Emergency (fig. 3.3) is a group exhibit that took place in an old Hamburg hospital in 1999. Approximately ten artists had the use of the old hospital for their installations. The artists were invited to choose a space, a room, or a hallway in order to come up with an original work on the general theme of the hospital. Rumland picked a room from which she could view the chimney of the laundry building, because it reminded her of the crematorium in Nazi Germany's extermination camps. The room already featured a single sink and a mirror. In her

piece, Rumland simply heightened the pre-existing cold atmosphere of the hospital with the view of what she calls the crematory chimney and some other simple elements.

Under the window of the room, she displayed two identical photographs that she had taken of the washroom in the concentration camp, Theresienstadt. Because she did not label them, it was not apparent where they were taken. Rumland pointed out to me that there originally had been no washroom in the “little fortress” of Theresienstadt, a place where camp inmates were investigated and tortured, and that it had only been installed because the Swiss Red Cross had come to investigate rumours of the camp’s horrors. Rumland also covered the floor with thick sheets of transparent plastic, in order to provide the room with what she calls a terribly cold atmosphere. A third photograph was displayed on the wall, depicting her parents inside the room in the act of viewing the installation. The last element of the piece was a series of mirrors that she installed around the room, in addition to the one mirror that had already been there. They were displayed at viewing height, as one would install paintings in a gallery. The mirrors reflected each other, the photographs, and the room’s window, and provided a view of the floor and a view onto the apparent crematory chimney outside the window – the metaphorical view into the oven Rumland referred to in the interview. The mirrors aided in implicating the audience in the piece by giving off their reflections. As Rumland describes it in her artist statement on the untitled installation:

A row of mirrors runs around the wall. The viewer becomes entangled in a system that could mean both rescue and threat, not just today, not in a hospital alone... The chimney outside awakens memories of another story.³³

³³ Catalogue for *Emergency* (Hamburg: Doelling und Galitz Verlag, 1999): 42.

This piece was very important to Rumland, but its installation angered the other members of the artist collective. She viewed the entire experience of the conflict as a nearly unbearable situation:

The others rejected me, talked bad about me behind my back. The room was impossible, I should be kicked out... After about a week, at the end of the exhibition, they decided to have a disco in my room, because there was so little that had to be moved. I was speechless.

Rumland believes that the rejection by the other artists was partially based on her own visible fear about exhibiting her piece. It was her first installation and she was afraid to make the subject of the Third Reich so visible, especially because the piece had become so personal due to the inclusion of her parents' photograph: "I believe that might have started it. I think I came into the enterprise feeling like a kind of victim. I gave off insecure vibes." Rumland also believes that the audience simply did not wish to face such groundlessness and horror. However, she feels that, overall, even though her main subject consistently hits a wall with her audience, small breakthroughs have been possible: "I always talk. I tell stories. I do approach people with the subject. In personal contacts I always enter the subject, but no more."

An article in *Die Welt* comments on Rumland's contribution to *Emergency*:

To be a patient means to be centred on one's essence, until only fear for our life and the belief in the doctor and medical appliances remain. Thus it is logical that some artists have left their usual art medium behind, in order to get to the inner core of their idea. For example, painter Suse Rumland, who has "bandaged" an entire room: the floor with sterile plastic foil, the walls with cold mirrors and photos of endless rows of wash basins – the hygienic "Lager" life of the "inmates" of a clinic. A painterly mark is nowhere to be seen.³⁴

The article clearly connects the installation to the subject of the Third Reich by the author's use of the German word *Lager*, which he uses to denote a concentration camp.

³⁴ Christiane Wettig, "Das ehemalige Hafenkrankenhaus, geröntgt und verpflastert [The Former Harbour Hospital, X-rayed and Bandaged]," *Die Welt*, 27 February 1999: 14.

Although the subject of the Third Reich had been an underlying concern in the work of Suse Rumland from the very beginning, in *Emergency* she embraced the subject matter for the first time, although she was not comfortable in making it too obvious to the general audience. Some of the piece's effectiveness came into focus by the rejection she experienced from her fellow artists in this group show. Their discomfort with the underlying subject caused them to turn against the creator of the piece. This is a highly plausible argument, especially since press commentaries on her particular piece were positive. *Emergency* successfully implicates the viewer into the history of the Third Reich, through its use of mirrors and the way it leaves the viewer with a vast amount of space – and time – to contemplate their own emotions with regards to Germany's past in the large and nearly empty old hospital room.

Showers

Perhaps the most disturbing theme in Suse Rumland's work is her subject of showers. It is also the theme through which it is most apparent how past and present are entangled in her life and art. A shower is meant to be comforting, promising us cleanliness and warmth in a setting of privacy. But this is definitely not the case in Rumland's *Shower* series, which she produced from 1999 to 2000:

At some point in time, I noticed – I had rather suppressed it – that I grew up with showers, shower stories from concentration camps. I don't shower. If it is hot, I can rinse myself off. I clean myself at the sink or have a bath, but I don't take a shower. At some point in time, I took on that subject because to me the word *shower* had been occupied. It is a word which allows no freedom, and that became my subject.

It's not only the word that has been occupied but also the act of showering. In this series, Rumland attempts to work through her conflicted relationship to showers, based on their significance as a killing apparatus in Nazi-Germany's death camps. She thinks of the mixed media works, *Showers*, as images of her psyche:

These are images of my actual inside. I think that they may be more disquieting to those who look. The bathroom floors were important to me, those tiles, hygiene in a doubled sense. That grey here – a mixture of water, of negative and positive. Showers are not actually discomfoting. If that comes across I don't know, but for me that working-through, visible for others, was important for my own process of understanding.

Rumland pointed out that the symbolic function of water, like clouds, in all of her works habitually stands in for ashes, providing us yet with another look into the oven.

One of Rumland's *Showers* is a larger canvas from 2000, measuring 130 by 130 centimetres (fig. 3.4). The work is an oil painting on nettle fabric. The canvas has been worked in layers, in mainly blue and white colours. In the centre of the canvas, there is a giant showerhead, which looks somewhat like a blue flying saucer. It is not really attached to any plumbing, as the blue pipe that the showerhead attaches to has been painted over with white smoke or clouds. The top right quarter of the square canvas features a very dark blue cloud shape that has been painted very roughly. It hovers over the showerhead. Underneath the showerhead a few thin lines have been scratched into the foggy white background of the work. The lines symbolically represent water, but they fall short of hitting the bottom of the canvas. Instead they end up looking like lines used for a head count. A single blood-red line is attached to the left side of the showerhead. The blood is either trickling downwards or being sucked up. Metaphorically, the image recalls the deadly showers in the gas chambers where masses of German Jews were killed in Nazi extermination camps. (Their bodies were then disposed of in crematory ovens.) These are the crematory ovens that Rumland previously alluded to in *Emergency*.

Rumland's *Showers*, like her other works discussed so far, are of a highly personal nature. She has used this particular series in order to approach her personal involvement in the history and the aftermath of Auschwitz. To the viewer,

these works may appear ambiguous on first sight. However, once we are familiar with Rumland's general artistic vocabulary, the sinister undertone of the pieces comes fully into focus.

Little Animals

The last group of works that I include in my analysis is Suse Rumland's photo series *Little Animals – Tierchen*. It is an ongoing project, and may therefore be viewed as the artist's most recent work. Rather than being a body of work made for a specific purpose at a specific moment in time, this is a series that has developed over the years. Rumland continues to add images to this collection of photographs, based on the toy animals and figurines she has been collecting for at least seven years:

I buy them at flea markets. They are the most intriguing creatures, yet the most horrible things – both sugary sweet and a bottomless hole; they exist across all cultures. I photographed them because they give off both impressions.

I asked Rumland how she selects the toys, whether they have to belong to a specific period in time or whether they must have an emotional link to her own childhood. She answered that she calls her selection process an arbitrary one. Most of the figures she encounters at flea markets strike her as boring, but once in a while she finds one that stirs something inside of her:

It's their expression that catches my eye, and then I buy them. I believe that it is their two-sidedness that attracts me, their multiple sides: that cute, seemingly sweet disposition which is immediately denied by the overall look of the figure.

The glossy photographs measure five by seven inches each and feature odd compositions of small rubber toys, animals, and human figures. Whereas Rumland's *Tierchen* photos in general deal with violence, some of the photos combine the theme of violence with the subject of Nazi Germany. Of the dozens of photographs, I have chosen six that seem to be the most relevant for their Third Reich content.

On first sight Suse Rumland's *Little Animals* seem highly appealing, very playful, and almost candy-like. But on second look they appear highly disturbing and reveal a sinister layer of meaning in the context of Nazi Germany. Except for a couple of these approximately fifty images, the scenes are photographed against a fairly uniform pink background. Many of the photos feature very strong shadows, which take on an appearance of additional, unidentifiable, and therefore disturbing objects against the uniformly bright pink background. Although Rumland has actually shot the scenes in and around her studio, the images do not give the viewer the impression of striving to be traditional studio photography. Many of the scenes are shot off centre, and some of them are out of focus. To date Rumland's *Little Animals* have been exhibited only once, in the city of Ahrensburg, near Hamburg.

One photograph depicts two figures of boys with somewhat exaggerated dimensions (fig. 3.5). They are both wearing uniform-like yellow jackets and sport caps that are reminiscent of helmets. Both are grinning. One is averting his eyes while the other one looks directly at the audience; his pants are down. Rumland finds that he appears to have a mean, cunning look about him. The other boy figure hides his hands deep in his pockets, as if he were concealing something. Together, the two of them appear to be accomplices in an evil deed, and give off an air of violence. As she put it, "One wouldn't want to meet up with such characters, at least not in that combination." Stupidity and cunning equal violence, and that appears to be the photo's focus.

The second image is especially important to Rumland. It depicts what she refers to as an old mother rabbit, holding a food basket (fig. 3.6). The mother rabbit is to the left of the photo, clad in the traditional kind of outfit I am familiar with from German fairy stories. She bows devotedly before two figures of identical, grinning bunny rabbits that appear to be male. Only partially visible, they enter the

image from the right and are lined up next to each other. Because of their partial visibility (their backsides are cut off by the photo's margin), one could easily imagine endless rows of identical pairs behind them. While the female rabbit appears small and docile and features a fearful smile, the male rabbits appear to be strong and muscular, their broad grins indicative of the fact that they are either unaware of the imbalanced situation of power or they simply do not care. As Rumland describes them,

They are exact copies of each other, and to me they symbolize an army, the German per se, an image of Germanness. The woman serves the male rabbits, who are about to conquer the world. Her basket contains their food, to keep them in a good mood, in the hope that eventually they will leave.

In comparison with the figure of the female rabbit in her colourful outfit, both of the male rabbits are equally brown. Rumland calls them brown shirts.³⁵ The image's reference to the Third Reich is readable not only to Rumland but, as a second-generation German artist myself, I had picked it for a close analysis from a large number of other images in the *Little Animals* series.

The third photo depicts a fair-skinned and blue-eyed German-looking doll in the centre of the image (fig. 3.7). She is wearing a blue dress that reminds me of the dresses I wore growing up in Germany. The doll is paired with the much smaller figure of a small, naked green-haired troll who features green hair, red eyes, and brown skin. The troll is standing right in front of the girl, looking straight at the viewer. Because the troll reaches up to only the hem of the girl's dress, the girl appears unaware of his existence. The impression of her unawareness or willful ignorance is heightened by the fact that the girl is averting her eyes to the left of the photograph. Although the two figures are displayed in close proximity to each other, they seem to have no connection to each other. Once again there is the sense

³⁵ "Brown shirts" is an expression used in the Third Reich to refer to the Nazis, because of their brown uniforms.

of a great imbalance in the power situation, which is rendered particularly disturbing by the image's subtly violent aspects. Several fingers on the girl's right hand are smeared with a small amount of what appears to be red paint but reads as blood, and her left hand is inserted in the pocket of her dress, as if she were in the process of concealing or revealing something secret or potentially dangerous. Rumland calls her a German girl in a blue dress, and finds her appalling, especially in combination with the figure of the troll:

This is a world of oppositions – I can hardly describe it: it's disgusting, somehow very disgusting. Both of them are disgusting on their own, and they disgust me in a different way in their combination. The girl looks somewhat shy, fearful, yet as if she wants to know, and the troll has a harmless kind of stupid look.

In reference to Rumland's family's past, this image can be read as an illustration of several disturbing facts in Germany's recent history. The image illuminates the arbitrary division in Nazi Germany between who was defined as German and who was not. It also alludes to the seeming innocence of the bystanders who averted their eyes from the fate of their non-Aryan neighbours, and their consequent implication in the violence that ensued. That is, German "bystanders" are suggested by the doll's "blood-stained" red fingers. The figure of the girl might serve as an image that Rumland can identify with. As a "two-worlds" member, she is both identified with and distances herself from the perpetrators of Nazi Germany.

The fourth image I selected features a multitude of figures, this time shot against a black and white background (fig.3.8). The figures are fairly evenly distributed on the surface of what, on first sight, looks like a large sheet of white paper, torn along the edges. After closer viewing, the paper turns out to be a piece of sheet metal that was once painted evenly white, but now sports dark areas around the edges where the paint has peeled off. What gives it away as sheet metal is the fact that a drain hole is visible in the top left quarter of the photograph.

Rumland placed the piece of metal on several white wire garden chairs for support. The metal grids are barely visible to the left and top of the photograph, and give the impression that we are looking at a space that is fenced in. It resembles a place of confinement, either a jail or prison court.

There are numerous figurines on display in this image. The only two erect figures in the image are a stereotypical deer, or Bambi, and a bear. They stand to the right side of the hole in the ground and look towards the sky, sporting friendly smiles. Scattered around them are what appear to be a dozen corpses of other animals and dolls. Of particular interest is the fact that, among the dead, there is another deer, next of kin to the standing Bambi. While most of the supine figures lie in close proximity to the drain hole on the left of the image, three of them are displayed in a row to the right of the standing figures. The overall impression is that the supine figures have been killed, and are waiting to be disposed of through the hole in the ground – those who are close to the drain hole immediately, while the others off-side are waiting for their turn. Although the two main figures don't actually look like "murderers," the allusion that they are in fact the perpetrators who "killed" the other dolls appears clear. Rumland feels that the association is easily made because the bear has such a joyful look about him and seems to be boasting: well, that's been done with! As the scene has been photographed on a black-and-white background, sporting the grid of the garden chairs off the side, it reminds me of a crime scene, although Rumland connects the image to war photography. In the context of the Third Reich, both readings aid the viewer in deciphering the content of the image.

The fifth image depicts what Rumland calls "three weird angels," by which she means harmless, yet cunning and somewhat insatiable angels, looking down onto a small, dumb piglet, pretending to mean no harm (fig.3.9). In this image, for the first time, it becomes evident that the habitual pink surface has been created by

Rumland setting up her scenes on a modern garden chair. In this case, its odd shape allows us to see two semi-circles of background in the top left and right corners of the image. The near-black semi-circles reveal a few plant-like objects in the background; in the case of the other photos they simply add an odd, abstract property to the photos, which renders them even more disturbing for their context of Pop-Art. In the centre of the photo are three standing figures, identical except for minor differences: three fair-skinned, blond-haired, blue-eyed figures of small children, wearing identical, angelic-looking long gowns. The figures stand in a row, in close proximity to each other. While one of them holds a book, the other two carry flowers. Despite the fact that Rumland refers to them as angels, they have no wings. Right in front of the three angels is the figure of a piglet wearing a bib. Food appears to be smeared around the pig's face, as if the creature had just been fed by someone. The pig is not only smaller than the angels but is also placed in front of them and slightly lower, making it appear even smaller than the figures in the background. While the three angels are interacting with each other, eyes averted to the left of the photo, the pig appears to be in its own world, despite its close proximity to the angels, looking directly up at the viewer. The image's associations to the Third Reich are similar for both Rumland and me. She points out the Nazis' use of the pig to symbolize Jews, precisely because Jews do not eat pork. Rumland views this as the ultimate act of disrespect: "They pretend that nothing is the matter, but in fact the angels despise the pig." In viewing this particular image, there is the feeling that the figure of the pig is looking at the viewer directly, in order to make us a potential witness of things to come.

The last image I wish to focus on is the one that Rumland presented me with when I first met her two years earlier. The photo depicts two pink, clown-like figures in its centre, featuring happy grins. Their colourful bow ties are identical and their arms are lifted in a German salute, as if to say *Heil*. Rumland refers to the

figures as “egg heads.” The ordinariness of their life, and its base of conformity, are painfully present to her. In my interpretation of the image, it does not make a difference that their left arms are raised in a salute, opposed to the right-armed salute of the Nazis. As an artist working with the history of the Third Reich, the symbolism of the image immediately became apparent to me. However, I asked Rumland whether, to her mind, others might be able to pick up on her clues about Nazi Germany as readily. Left arms aside, in her opinion the repetition alone, the fact that there are two identical figures, allows for that connection.

Suse Rumland's *Little Animals* are perhaps the most effective works she has produced on the subject of the Third Reich. Their apparent cuteness, together with their soft pink background, draws us in immediately and lets us realize only on second thought that we are not on safe ground. Rumland's paintings and drawings reveal a highly personal character, as the artist's mark is visible through her intense layering, scratching, and erasing techniques. *Little Animals*, on the contrary, have adapted a general look of popular imagery. What makes them so effective is that, among these numerous images, each and every one of us may find an item on display that will trigger childhood memories, generally of a fond nature. The disturbing factor is that once we are drawn into such an image, we will realize the discomforting properties of the scenery Rumland has put together, and find ourselves destabilized.

Over the twenty-year period during which Rumland has been a practising visual artist, a distinct development from a subconscious to a more conscious involvement with the subject matter of the Third Reich has become apparent. Whereas, before the birth of her son in 1984, Rumland had been painting mostly for personal pleasure, after she separated from her partner her art practice took on greater importance and became much more concrete as she became conscious of

the underlying issues that pertained to the history of the Third Reich. Rumland's process of working with that history has both conscious and unconscious aspects:

I knew the story and had to paint it. It is not the other way around, rather a mixture of the two possibilities. I started by mixing colours, but the result was that I worked with these layers, multiple layers, through which I really lived and that are part of me – many different sides, different stories in this country: what has been covered up, what is in the ground. That was extremely important, that was the beginning. That's when my art really started.

The first images that Rumland publicly exhibited were some of her early layered paintings, at the Hamburg University in 1979. These works were an early attempt to find an adequate language for herself, in order to explore her underlying concerns and in order to communicate them to others. In an interview with the press, Rumland said, "I come from two worlds. As a social worker I am able to help hands-on in the real exterior world, and as an artist I am able to synthesize my experiences into paintings in an interior world."³⁶ The unidentified author of the interview suggests that Rumland's paintings challenge the viewer to an emotional dialogue through their strong colours, intensity, and depth. The author considers her work to be a concrete kind of visual language that functions metaphorically. It is a kind of writing with decipherable signs that trigger associations in the audience.

Rumland's difficulty to identify with any one world brought her to the subject of layers in the quest for knowledge about a past that appears diffuse to her, both on the historical and the personal level. The acceptance that this unthinkable past had not just one answer, but many stories, was the beginning of what she considers the real start of her art-making practice. After coming to that knowledge of multiple narratives, clearer themes appeared in her work which before had seemed unfocused, and her underlying concerns started to become visible, if not yet to her audience:

³⁶ J.B., "'Botschaften' in Malerei und Bildhauerei [Messages in Painting and Sculpture]," Ahrensburg, 1999. Unidentified newspaper clipping, courtesy of the artist.

My creative process was no longer unconscious as it was in the times when I painted just about anything without knowing why. Now I simply had to do something, and there was more content. I now needed the subject to be clear and visible to me, even if others could not see it at first.

These layered paintings sport multiple coats of paint. Often, her work involved the process of scratching on painted surfaces and then obliterating parts of her images by painting over them. As a process, layers appear in many of her later works as well (for example, in an exhibit entitled *Farbenschmaus und Nachtgeschmack* – a taste of colours and a taste of night – which took place in Bad Oldesloe in 1996). Rumland's layer paintings are representative of her attempts to discover what is under and in between the multiple layers of German history.

Suse Rumland first started to exhibit her work in a professional setting while she was pregnant with her son. She now ponders whether having to deal with her son's history in addition to her own may have contributed to her wish to confront and explore Germany's past. At the time of her first show, her mode of working was rather abstract, yet her underlying concerns with the Third Reich had already become conscious to her, as was the need to communicate them to others. When I asked her how much of her concerns she allowed to become visible to her audience in that first exhibit, and in subsequent exhibitions, she said that "many were made uncomfortable by the images, but the subject was not clear to them. I believe that I could tell from their reactions that everyone knew: this is not only beautiful, it is also terrible."

Rumland confirms that there was the distinct possibility of entering into the underlying content of her images with the help of little signs, and that she purposely provided such entry points. When approached about the works' meaning, she would readily give out additional information. Furthermore, in her opinion, those who already knew her could see what she could not talk about. In working with the subject of her family's past in the Third Reich, Rumland is negotiating

the precarious balance between wanting to be understood by the audience without taking away from the intricacy of the artwork itself. At the same time, she has to negotiate her wish to make the audience her witness with her need of privacy for self-protection.

Suse Rumland habitually exhibits her work with other artists. Working with a group is important to her in most aspects of her life. This can be linked back to her father, who needed to rely on others in order to survive in a hostile environment, but also to the fact that Rumland's sense of belonging in Germany relates to having friends. A catalogue on the work of the women artists' group "Pourpour," of which Suse was a member, states in response to their group's exhibition:

They know that their artworks must ask questions, but not the common ones, the large or politically correct ones. To the contrary: they demand openness of their art, so there may be space for viewing. Space for the viewer's thoughts, experiences, memories – in a room without frontiers that has freed the art of the artist. And yet, the autobiographical is hidden in the play of colour and form, in the processes that run parallel in artwork and artist alike, in the free-flowing language of images and that which we could simply call the artistic experiment of making art. The women call it "labour that unites speechless knowledge with visible form."³⁷

After becoming conscious of her underlying subject matter of the Third Reich, Rumland started her career as an exhibiting artist with layered images. Simultaneously, in her personal life, she was digging deeper into the layers of the Third Reich past, and looking for a language with which to address her concerns. This became apparent in her triptych *Writing*. After attempting to build towers as "life-designs," looking for safety in small boats, and contemplating the history of showers, she found herself in a state of emergency: over time, the need had arisen to not only deal with the conflicted past of Nazi Germany on her own, but to

³⁷ Christine Wettig, *Power mit Pourpur* (Hamburg: Druckerei Zollenspieker Kollektiv GmbH, 1997): n.p.

communicate with and to approach others. This revelation culminated in her installation piece in the group exhibition *Emergency* and left her feeling rejected.

I suggest that with her *Little Animals* Rumland is working towards a medium ground, between her wish to be personal and private, and the need to be political and public – her needs to express herself and to be heard. Her sickly cute *Little Animals* implicate us by evoking our own childhoods. Thus they are successful in drawing us in and keeping us there, forcing us to contemplate our own histories with regards to the Third Reich, and leaving us “stuck inside,” somewhat like Suse Rumland feels in Germany.

CHAPTER 4

Eva Brandl

Behind the Gates

Eva Brandl practises and teaches art in Montreal, where she lives with her partner and their son. I interviewed Eva at length on 15 June and 3 July in 2001.

Eva Brandl was born in Stuttgart in 1951. Her father was an architect. After the war much of Germany was left in ruins, but there was no money to rebuild. Eva's father decided to emigrate to Canada with his family. Eva was nine months old when she first came to Canada with her parents and older sister. The family had left Germany by a ship that brought them straight to Quebec City, where Eva's father found a job. Eva's parents decided to live on the Isle d'Orléans, a beautiful island where Eva spent most of her youth.

In 1960, when she was nine years old, Eva's father decided to return to Europe to obtain his doctorate in philosophy in Vienna, Austria, so her parents packed up their things once again to go back, this time planning to eventually return to Germany for good after her father finished school in Austria. By that time, there were five children in the family. Once again they took a ship. They brought along all their belongings, packed in crates. The boat took them from Montreal to Italy, where they were dropped off in the port of Genoa. Eva's mother and the children were put up in a hotel while her father went to Vienna, to start his academic year and to find a house. The other family members were to follow once he was settled. Eva's mother and the five children ended up staying in the hotel in the port of Genoa for two months. It was a "wild" experience, because the children did not speak Italian and were not enrolled in school. They spent their days riding elevators and, basically, driving their mother crazy, while all of their belongings were in storage.

Eva's father kept in contact with his family. He told them that a friend had offered to help them in their difficult situation. The friend and his wife had built a house outside of Vienna, which he would rent to the Brandls. They went to Vienna by train, with all of their belongings to follow. In Vienna they moved into a Walter Gropius type of house that was built of plate glass and steel, but in such an unfamiliar open space, and still without furniture, there was little to keep the children from getting on their mother's nerves. Due to his studies, Eva's father was unable to be around very much. The Brandls "camped" in this house for another two to four months.

Eventually the children were sent to school in Vienna. They were fluent in German because they spoke it at home. Going to school in Vienna was an interesting but traumatic experience for Eva. For three years she had gone to school with the Catholic nuns in Quebec City. Now in Vienna she suddenly had a matronly teacher who slapped the children on their fingers with a stick. The Viennese German was different from the German the children spoke at home, and they ended up feeling like total outcasts in their new community. They felt completely lost. The children had in fact lost not only their Canadian home but a sense of fluency – both cultural and linguistic – that was to have an impact on Brandl much later in life. The Brandl family lived a very isolated life in Vienna, and the children had only one friend at school. There was no opportunity to go to the neighbours to play because they lived in an isolated house on a hill in a very opulent community, where children generally did not mix with outsiders. In retrospect the entire period in Vienna strikes Eva as somewhat surreal.

At the time Eva did not worry much about whether she belonged in Canada or in Germany because, as long as their mother was around, the children felt secure. As a child in Vienna, Eva lived day by day. She did think, however, that she was going to stay in Europe, because her father was working towards his degree.

She thought that Germany would end up being her home. The family's stay in Vienna lasted just under a year – it became impossible for Eva's father to study because of the tumultuous living arrangement. After a year, Eva's mother and children moved from Austria to Germany, to stay with Eva's maternal grandparents just outside of Heidelberg. They lived in a little village in an old house, with chickens running around in the garden. The children easily adapted. They forgot all of their French, went to the local school, and spoke only German. Their father stayed in Vienna to continue his studies.

Eva's mother was born in 1924. The family on Eva's mother's side had lived near Heidelberg for generations. Eva's father was born in Nuremberg around 1917. Eva doesn't know much about her paternal grandparents, just that her father was an only child of a Belgian mother who had married a German. At the end of the war, Eva's mother was in her early twenties when she met Eva's father, who was a soldier at the time. Because Eva's maternal grandparents had sent gifts to the children during their years in Canada, and Eva's family had a lot of pictures and stories of the German relatives, the children found it relatively easy to feel at home with their mother's family.

Eva and her siblings got to know their maternal grandparents during their stay in Germany, especially their family story, which was very vivid for Eva. Eva's mother told the children a lot of stories about war times in Germany. During the Nazi regime, Eva's mother had been a member of the BDM (*Bund Deutscher Mädel*), the Hitler Youth for girls. She was familiar with Third Reich literature. In Quebec she had regularly talked to them about her memories of growing up in Germany: stories about the riots in the streets when she was fourteen, and stories of ill-fated girls who were running around to meet boys – the bad fate of some, the good fate of others. Eva especially remembers her mother's epic war stories. Whenever the sirens went off during bomb alarms, her mother had to go and hide in a hole in the

backyard. While living at their grandparents' place, Eva and her siblings repeatedly looked for the hole. The children wanted to know where the mythical hole was, because they had heard about it so many times. Their grandfather told them that it was somewhere under the parsley patch in the garden, but they never found it. To Eva, her mother's stories were more adventurous than scary.

Eventually the children had to be dispersed, because the grandparents' home was not large enough for so many. While one of Eva's sisters went to Basel in Switzerland, Eva was sent to the countryside to live with an aunt. She attended fourth grade there. Her mother stayed behind with the little ones. Although she remembers that she lived in a very simple German household in a rural area, Eva's memories of that period are faint. She cannot recall what kind of school work she was doing. She remembers having to take a lot of physical education classes, but beyond that she has no memories. Sometimes this period in her life almost feels like a story to Eva, as if she has not really lived it.

Around 1962, after the family had spent about a year in Germany, Eva's father showed up at her grandparents' place. He told the family to pack their bags to go back to Canada. That wasn't so difficult because they hadn't ever unpacked – all of their things were still in storage. The family went to Bremerhaven with their belongings, took a boat, and returned to Canada. Eva vividly remembers being on the boats, fourteen days going to Germany and fourteen days coming back. In comparison, her memory of living in Germany is vague. The family went right back to the village of Saint Jean where they had lived before. They ended up living in a house that was only two houses down from their first home. To Eva it felt like a replay of their first trip to Quebec.

Eva does not remember the transition from Germany to Canada as being difficult – at eleven years old, she was too young for the move to be an issue. Back in their familiar environment, the children had to learn to speak French once again.

In Quebec they were always living in two realms. At home there were certain German traditions and the family was essentially German. Outside of home, at school and with their friends, the children ignored everything German, leaving behind as much as possible all that would identify them as being different. Although during their stay in Germany, they had held on to a German identity, not wanting to be viewed as different "little French Canadian kids," back in Canada their struggle to fit in required that they repudiate their Germanness. Eva finished primary school and high school on the island of Orléans, then moved across the river in order to continue her schooling. Eva generally remembers her schooling to have been very unexciting. Her parents were adamant about her performing well in school, but that was not difficult for her. After finishing high school, in 1967, Eva studied theatre design for a year before enrolling in Visual Arts at Laval University in Quebec City. After obtaining her bachelor's degree in 1974, Eva moved to Montreal, in order to pursue her Master's degree in sculpture at Concordia University.

Although Eva spent her first nine years in French Quebec, her upbringing was very German. It was only once she left home at twenty-one and moved to Montreal that she felt German had been moved into the background. At Concordia Eva studied for three years in the Master's program, which she finished in 1976. During her studies she became a teaching assistant, although initially she hadn't intended to teach. Instead she had the fixed idea of going to architecture school or into stage design. Since 1976 she has taught Visual Arts for nearly twenty-five years in Montreal, at Concordia University and Marianapolis College.

Eva decided very late on having children, as she spent a long time on her schooling and building her career. Once she felt stable as an artist, she had her first and only child at thirty-nine years of age. Eva finds having only one child very

demanding, having grown up in a large family that functioned like a community, where everybody took care of everybody else.

Eva Brandl is still a German citizen because she always felt that it would be a kind of betrayal of her family to become a Canadian citizen. Her parents have always insisted on her keeping her German passport. In fact, for a long time she did not have her own but was registered on her parents' passport, in order to make sure that she wouldn't change her citizenship. Brandl refers to herself as an artist born in Germany, living and working in Canada. She does not wish to deny her place of birth, although her entire contribution as an artist has been in Canada. With regards to being German, Brandl experiences feelings of ambiguity. She can speak about her background from only a very emotional viewpoint, experiencing a dichotomy between pride and something akin to shame. This leaves her very uneasy. Her parents taught her to be proud of being different and being German, but there is also an entire side of German history that she is uncomfortable with.

Sometimes Eva wonders what might have been, where her art and her personal life would have gone, had she stayed in Germany. In 1975 she applied at the Düsseldorf Academy to do her Master's degree, but when she went to visit she "freaked out" and could not pursue the program there. Sometimes she regrets this, and feels that she should have just overcome her fear, but she felt like a foreigner in Germany. Furthermore, the environment she encountered in Germany was just too rigid and frightening for her. She thinks that she was frightened by what that strictness represented to her.

Eva Brandl feels that she is always in two places, that part of her is from elsewhere. When she visits Germany, she ends up disappointed because the experience never meets her expectations. That is, Brandl believes that there is something much more profound in Germany that she is after, but it is not about German life – "it is lost." Eva believes that this sense of some unnameable loss has

influenced her work as an artist, rather than a superficial sense of belonging or not belonging to Germany.

Analysis of Works

Eva Brandl is a Montreal-based artist who has exhibited nationally and internationally. She has a reputation for creating sculptural installations of a highly dramatic character. In her installations she makes use of both her background in theatre design and her early ambition to become an architect. Over the course of the past twenty years, Brandl produced several large-scale works that lend themselves to a discussion of second-generation German visual art. I have chosen to discuss two installations in particular, *The Golden Gates* (1984) and *Model for a Temple of Reason* (1987). I also focus on Brandl's recent involvement with the theme of Faust, particularly in her two sculptural installations *Faust, Les Sortilèges* (1993) and *Faust ou La Tentation du Possible* (1997). As I have not seen any of these installations on exhibit, my analysis of Brandl's artworks is based on slides and photographs.

Eva Brandl's large-scale installations consist of a number of sculptural elements. She frequently combines the sculptural components of her installations with projections, dramatic lighting, and special effects. The installations are generally reminiscent of theatre stages and tend to involve the viewer's participation. Due to the complex nature of Brandl's installations, it is impossible to obtain a detailed understanding of the pieces by viewing the documentation only. I am therefore relying on additional information, both from interviewing the artist and from texts written about the pieces while they were on exhibit. The analysis of Brandl's work differs from that of the other artists' work in that I focus on the major components and themes, rather than attempting an analysis of individual aspects of these complex environments.

The Golden Gates

Brandl exhibited her installation piece *The Golden Gates* (fig. 4.1) in her Clark Street studio in Montreal in 1984. Parts of the installation were exhibited again in 1985 and 1987. *The Golden Gates* was an "in situ" piece, indigenous to the particular space of the artist's studio. Brandl describes the importance of her studio in the construction of her early works:

These early pieces were tied to the Clark Street studio. You could find all kinds of things written on the wall. Evidence, perhaps, that there was a lot of history there. I had this space alone to myself for a while, several thousand square feet. I had a lot of communication with that space: memories, the things I would find.

She explains that instead of starting with a fixed premise, her work usually starts with an image or object that serves as the point of departure:

I hang onto something, and all of a sudden it finds an image, and something develops in and around that image. Sometimes it stays an image for a long time, until something else takes its place. It's comfortably impulsive.

Brandl's initial source of inspiration for *The Golden Gates* was a slide of an ocean liner, the *Mauritania*, one of the sister ships of the *Titanic*. She had seen it in the Pompidou library in Paris and obtained a copy, which she had kept around in her studio for some time. And although she may not have known that the lost city of Atlantis was also called the "City of the Golden Gates," Brandl's work certainly evokes a sense of that mythic place's distance and inaccessibility. In her installation she combined three projections with two main architectural components. Brandl began by building a small model of three archways, which measured approximately eighteen inches in total length. She then enlarged the model using set-building techniques and installed it in the centre of her studio, ending up with a structure that measured twenty feet in length and was four and a half feet tall. In building the archways, Brandl used an irregular, "ambiguous" scale that was larger than the model but smaller than reality. This is a scale she frequently employs in her work.

The archways appear to be massive and strong, but in fact they are very light, as Brandl has covered their basic, wooden structure with paper. The solid-looking archways are really quite fragile. As the paper is translucent, the wooden structure underneath the paper is partially exposed.

The archways, which resemble an aqueduct, divided the studio space into two general viewing sections. Onto the wall in the back section of her studio, which featured an interior, non-functional window, Brandl projected two slides. The first projection was the image of the ocean liner, the second a projection of a bluish fire. The front section of her studio, on its other side, faces the street and therefore has actual windows. For this section of the installation, Brandl built another architectural component: two small houses on stilts. They were meant to be two gatehouses. In between the gatehouses, Brandl hung a screen, onto which she projected a slide of a waterfall. She then blocked the windows in her studio so that the slide of the waterfall would not only be projected onto the screen but the entire space of her studio appeared to be engulfed in water, including the original columns in her studio space. In front of the columns, Brandl placed a set of small stairs that she constructed from glass. The glass stairs metaphorically stood for access but in fact were the very contradiction of accessibility.

To complete the installation, Brandl then added a large piece of broken glass that she had found in the alleyway. In the installation, this broken glass stood erect in the middle of the room, representing the protagonist in her elaborate environment. The piece of glass was partially covered by a white texture, reminiscent of white paint. In fact, the texture had been created by pigeon droppings, which the glass had been exposed to in the alleyway. To the piece of glass, Brandl added an illusionistic shadow and strategically lit the piece: "It cast a shadow, but the shadow was solid because I had traced it and cut it out and I put a

light underneath: it was like a ghost was present. This standing component was my protagonist."

In *The Golden Gates*, Brandl's general intention was to bring presence into the piece through absence. By transferring the image of the ocean liner onto a slide and projecting it onto her studio wall, she was able to obtain a very large image of the boat. The dramatic aspect of the scene was heightened by the fact that the decrepit walls in the Clark Street studios were literally falling apart. The visual effect that Brandl obtained from the boat's projection made it appear as if the boat was actually moving, even though she used a still image:

It's not still – it's in motion – but it feels like it's going full steam ahead. My desire was to destroy that image, but how could I destroy it? It was too beautiful. There was something about the dramatic beauty of it. How could it go to its own destruction?

According to Brandl, the boat is a symbol for something that cannot last, she had to visually destroy the image: "In order for it to not last, you have to destroy it, have to let go of it, burn it – because you are going to let go of it. You make it timeless by letting go." In order to "destroy" the image of the ocean liner, Brandl over-projected the image, obtaining a visual effect in which the boat appears to have no limits. It appears to be going full steam into the projection of fire. The projection of the *Mauritania* hit the interior, non-functional window of her studio to create the illusion of movement: "It just comes and goes, there is a movement of coming and going – it is going to its own destruction."

In order to enter the exhibition, the viewer first had to pass through the doors of the studio space. Brandl had given these doors a luminous appearance by covering them with bronze powder. During the exhibition of *The Golden Gates*, viewers tended to gravitate towards those golden doors. As Brandl suggests, it was an "entrance onto something that would be so beautiful but so fleeting that you could not grasp it." The piece was theatrically lit, and could be viewed in its

intended form only at night. And with its complex lighting and its general translucency, the final installation was also very difficult to document.

In summing up her intentions in building *The Golden Gates*, Brandl says in her artist statement:

The Golden Gates is a sculpture installation opening onto the collision and ambiguities through objects and images taken from my perception of reality but stripped from their linearity, visual or narrative. It exists through the tension of an imminent realization seemingly comforting at first and simultaneously troubling the order of things. This, because I chose to fragment, suspend, and recombine the many aspects of my experience. The distinctive setting is not site specific in terms of integrating the elements into the existing architecture; rather, the architecture acts as a frame for the staging of a dramatic event.³⁸

In my interview with her, Brandl confirmed this personal relationship:

I've always liked boats. There could be a link to my childhood experience. I have a very vivid image of sitting on my suitcase in the port of Montreal at night, in front of this incredible bow. I was told that we would board this boat. It was like a ghost. It was immense, larger than I could comprehend. I actually remember when the cables came in and we slowly left.

During the interview, Brandl explained that she views *The Golden Gates* as a portal in a "divine comedy," an entrance into something that will be so beautiful but so fleeting that you couldn't grasp it. She also said that *The Golden Gates* relate to the idea of there being an ideal place. They permit the viewer an encounter with that place, while combining it with a sense of destruction and loss: "Because you kind of get lost in it, as if you are your own shadow. The place is quite strategically lit, so your own shadow, your own body, would erase certain parts at a time. This gave the impression of a certain *perte*, or loss."

Chantal Boulanger in *Parachute* magazine discusses Eva Brandl's *The Golden Gates* in a similar vein. She explains that the installation appears as a fragmented landscape, "something like a constellation with a complex ramification", and

³⁸ Eva Brandl, Artist Statement, Gallery Optica, Montreal, 1984.

suggests that the installation is reminiscent of the child's game of joining the dots to make a picture. Except in this case, the viewer can do nothing but hop constantly from point to point without joining them.³⁹

In my discussion of *The Golden Gates* with Eva Brandl, she emphasized that she does not mean for the piece to be too closely interpreted: "In all my work, there is a real fight against making this too closely interpreted. It always gets pushed back into a semi-abstraction, although there are narrative elements in there." It is therefore not an easy task to interpret and analyze the work in detail. However, as far as second-generation German visual art is concerned, the installation appears to be an attempt by the artist to create a multi-faceted environment in which to confront her early childhood memories, specifically those of travelling from and to Germany by boat several times. This becomes manifest in Brandl's use of the image of the ocean liner. The fear that would have accompanied these voyages into an unsure future appears to be expressed in Brandl's destruction of the boat image, which is central to the piece.

The fact that Brandl would have perceived the future, as well as the past, as unstable is expressed in the fragile, yet imposing-looking architectural structures in the piece. Although Brandl does not consciously remember visual remnants of the war in Germany, she must have been exposed to them in post-war Germany, if only through the stories she was told. Thus the fragile structures in her pieces (such as the impermanent projections and the paper-covered archways) may both be linked to visual remnants of Nazi Germany's past and Brandl's perceptions of her environments as generally unstable during childhood.

Another key element of the installation is Brandl's use of light and shadow. *The Golden Gates* is a work that is meant to be viewed at night, lit by strategically

³⁹ Chantal Boulanger, "Eva Brandl," *Parachute*, 36 (September/October/November 1984): 50-51.

employed sources of light: "There are always these reflections, this *doublement*. Things get swallowed by light and also reappear. That's my light-shadow theme of things. Things become more concrete as shadows." In a childhood that has experienced a series of uprootings, things may indeed appear to become more concrete as shadows. The effects of Brandl's dramatic lighting tend to give a ghostly presence to some of the of the piece's components. Brandl herself pointed this out in the case of the boat itself and the piece of glass that stands in for the protagonist. It appears, then, that not only the audience frequents the piece – the work simultaneously creates a place where ghosts from the past are welcome.

In her creation of *The Golden Gates*, Brandl appears to be searching for an ideal place which, like the lost city of Atlantis, is a place she may have hoped to encounter in her repeated travels to and from Germany during childhood. As there was no encounter with such a place in her past, the longing is partially fulfilled in the creation of an artwork that addresses the past need. *The Golden Gates* can be interpreted as the artist's effort to confront her personal past, without making the piece a literal re-enactment of her early biography. Instead, the installation invites the viewer to look for their own stories, while allowing the connections made to Germany's past to rest quietly in the background. As Keith Wallace claims,

Brandl's art is not easy; its power lies in its ability to withhold and confound. The viewer is invited into the work by the evocative forms and material beauty but one must apprehend the objects within the space and imagine one's own narrative, one's own associations, and one's own meanings. The forms and images that Brandl has devised are vehicles to nurture the mnemonic potential within each of us.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Keith Wallace. "Eva Brandl: Morceaux choisis (pour Anatole)." (Vancouver: Contemporary Art Gallery, 1991): n.p.

Model for a Temple of Reason

In her 1987 installation, *Model for a Temple of Reason*, Eva Brandl once again drew on her interest in architecture. This time she constructed an architectural work that is basically a smelter, but is reminiscent of Egyptian pyramid constructions. The piece consists of three massive, imposing pieces of architecture, which Brandl constructed in her studio and later reassembled for exhibition at the Musée d'Art Contemporain in Montreal. For an accurate description of *Model for a Temple of Reason*, I am relying on two texts written at the time of the installation's exhibition. The first, by Trevor Gould, appeared in *C Magazine* in 1987.⁴¹ The second article, by Andrew Forster, was published in *Vanguard* magazine in the same year.⁴²

Brandl built her *Model for a Temple of Reason* after a 1790 design by the German architect Friedrich Gilly for a foundry that was never built. According to Brandl,

There is a whole period where they built these incredibly megalomaniac architectures that were like temples. The French called it *l'architecture parlant*, speaking architecture. This one was peculiar because it is based on an Egyptian, pyramidal structure with a tapered form. A lot of these architectures were designed for mausoleums – architecture of death.

Brandl had been attracted by this particular image as a source for the installation because of its dramatic qualities – “the smoke, the flames shooting out.” As is her usual process in her large architectures, Brandl first built a small-scale architectural model as a general idea for the installation and then enlarged the model in her studio.

⁴¹ Trevor Gould, “Eva Brandl,” *C Magazine*, 15 (September 1987): 55-56.

⁴² Andrew Forster, “Eva Brandl,” *Vanguard*, 16.4 (September-October 1987): 40-41.

Model for a Temple of Reason has two distinct parts. The audience encounters the first upon entering the installation, when the viewer is immediately detected by an electronic sensor. The sensor causes an image to be projected onto a navy-blue pleated curtain that separates the viewer from the main part of the installation in the rear of the exhibition space. The projected image is a nineteenth-century engraving, depicting two figures stoking an oven, entitled *The Guardians of Fire* (fig. 4.2). Brandl obtained the image from the *Encyclopédie Diderot* (1751-72), the work of French philosopher and writer Denis Diderot (1713-84). On the floor, in front of the projected image and strongly lit by a single spotlight, is a steel pole, wrapped in layers of lead. The pole is reminiscent of the tool for stoking the oven, which is used by a figure in the projection.

The second part of the installation is its main sculptural component, installed behind the curtain. The viewer can pass into the main exhibition area around either end of the curtain. In passing to the other side, the audience encounters the actual "temple," or smelter (fig. 4.3), consisting of the three large pyramid-like architectural structures, based on a design for a blast furnace or smelter by Friedrich Gilly (the German visionary architect). Gilly belonged to a generation of architects who designed small-scale architectural models out of paper, but unlike Gilly, Brandl has sheathed her pyramid-like, architectural model of the smelter with lead. It features chimneys that she has covered with copper, oxidized to a green colour.

Next to the "temple," along one of the walls, the viewer encounters four sculptural elements, all of which refer to the function of an actual furnace. The first element is a copper ring, which appears to be a settling pool for separating sediment. The second element is a steel cart filled with coal. The third element is a steel rake, which is used to rake down coals in a furnace. The fourth and last element is a row of twenty-six ingots that have been laid out on the floor next to

the cart. They all have the same German inscription: *alles fließt*, all is in flux. The furnace as well as the sculptural elements relate to the piece's general theme of transformation. Written on the top of the three architectural structures that make up the "temple" are three German words, *Mathematik*, *Natur*, *Antike* – mathematics, nature, and antiquity – which, according to Brandl, refer to the classics. The wall is covered in metal. The metal behind the three chimneys has a patina that looks like smoke rising upwards.

Upon entering the exhibition site, the viewer feels she is entering a theatrical set because of Brandl's use of the theatre curtain and dramatic lighting with a single spotlight. The theatrical lighting accentuates the shadows that are thrown by the "temple." The models of the chimneys and the pyramid-like furnaces are also constructed with set-building techniques. In the exhibition of the piece, Brandl has made it obvious that the viewer is meant to walk around and behind the structures she has built. A view from behind the imposing structures, however, exposes their wood and plywood armatures. This gives away the three components that make up the "temple" as mere sets, built as temporary structures, although from the front they appear to be solid and built for eternity. This theatrical fact of being a stage set was Brandl's intention. She did not attempt to hide the impermanence of her structures but rather integrated it into the meaning of her piece: "If you stray from it, all falls apart. No – it doesn't fall apart, but it's different. I was not interested in hiding it at all." In entering the exhibition site, the viewer becomes a player in Brandl's theatre set, a set that simultaneously attempts to be the real thing while giving away its secrets. As we are on a stage, we also become the participants in Brandl's drama of transformation.

According to Andrew Forster, the elements that make up *Model for a Temple of Reason* are idealized representations of some of the technology that lead us into the modern era, and made the promise to extend our mastery over nature to

unforeseen heights.⁴³ The furnaces of the industrial revolution were tools of transformation. They not only transformed ore into metal but promised to transform nature into a sector ruled by mankind. Eva Brandl's *Model for a Temple of Reason* illustrates the modern dream and its downfall, which became painfully apparent with World War II and the ensuing Holocaust. Trevor Gould highlights another aspect of the piece that establishes a further link to Nazi Germany and the Holocaust:

Written above the "temple" are three words that link the idea of industrial progress and reasoning. These are: "mathematics," "nature" and "antiquity," meaning, in this context, the classics. Providing a motto, or inscription, for buildings of this kind was a convention at the beginning of the industrial revolution as a way to valorize work, a way of legitimizing labour as a noble activity, and elevating the status of the work-site. This calls to mind a scene from Lina Wertmüller's film "Seven Beauties," where the camera lingers on the viciously cynical *Arbeit Macht Frei* (work or labour liberates or sets us free) inscription above the entrance to the Nazi concentration camp.⁴⁴

Although Gould contends that these are not necessarily the issues the artist is dealing with, he believes that they do relate to the installation's general theme of the rationalization of nature through processes of transformation and subjugation.

In the interview, Brandl pointed out yet another aspect that clearly links her piece to her subconscious preoccupation with the subject of Germany: the artist's search for a lost native country in her art practice. By what appeared to be coincidence, Brandl's point of departure for the *Model for a Temple of Reason* had been an image by a German architect:

By coincidence the starting image was by a German architect. I think that, from a personal point of view, I was trying to understand where I come from. Knowing that you have these origins, you want to understand what's in your lineage. Germans have an incredible history, in all aspects, so there is that subconscious desire to find out: what part of me can I find in there? So the process is not totally haphazard. If I had found another slide similar to that one, by a

⁴³ Forster, "Eva Brandl."

⁴⁴ Gould, "Eva Brandl," 55-56.

French architect, the French might have led me to the German. You see? It would probably have made a loop.

Brandl's comment confirms that she considers the connection of her art to the theme of Germany as something that is ultimately unavoidable. In fact, German artists are a continual source of attraction to her.

For example, Brandl considers the contemporary German artist Joseph Beuys her early mentor, and like Beuys, she is interested in the processes of alchemy and transformation. In the interviews, Brandl explained that Beuys has had a major impact on the evolution of her artistic practice. She explains how her early and ongoing interest in Beuys influenced the construction of the *Model for a Temple of Reason*:

A smelter transforms things. It transforms the raw metal. That's where Beuys comes in, through the use of the lead, and the shaping of the thought out of the creative process. This *primera materia* gets transformed and eventually is shaped into pieces of metal in the process of transformation. There is something very chemical about that. I was interested in the thought of something that is not stable, something that has allowed itself to move. Paradoxically, this is a very stable structure. There is nothing more stable than a pyramid – it has defied the time.

Brandl elaborated on the importance of Beuys in her construction of the *Model for a Temple of Reason*, a structure that projects a sense of stability on first view, while revealing under close inspection the fragile structure it is based on:

It is definitely something recurrent, that sense of hanging onto something and feeling a kind of security in terms of comprehending the world, while you know that you are on pretty uneven, treacherous ground. I think it's the essence of German philosophy. Art is an approximation of that possibility, that possibility of the impossible which art must transgress. There's a kind of a veneer that momentarily gives things a sense. Beuys was a piece of living drama. Maybe German history is a piece of living drama.

In these various ways, *Model for a Temple of Reason* can be viewed as a conscious approach to deal with Germany's modern history without making a literal connection to Germany's recent past. The use of the smelters in the piece, in conjunction with the other elements, is a clear link to the process of transformation

in general, and the industrial revolution in particular. This may be understood as the artist's philosophical reflection on progress and modernity per se. However, one also cannot avoid linking the symbol of the furnace to Nazi Germany's death camps and their crematoria, which, in turn, can be viewed as the ultimate failure of modernity.

On Faust

For a long time Brandl has worked with the theme of Faust. By 2001 she had constructed two major pieces specifically on the theme of Faust, and was planning a third.

Doctor Johannes Faust lived at the beginning of the sixteenth century. He was a medical practitioner and had studied astrology and alchemy as well as philosophy. He must have travelled a lot because there were reports of him from all German regions. Rumours and legends about him began while he was still alive. It was said that he was calling up the dead and practising black magic. The exact date and circumstances of his death are unknown, but it is assumed that he was murdered. With his death around 1540, the story began to circulate that he had made a pact with the devil. Although accounts of Faust's story were published as early as 1587, Goethe's publication of *Faust* from 1832 is considered to be the original.⁴⁵

Goethe added something new to the motif of the pact with the devil, something that breathes the Zeitgeist of the sixteenth century and would have been impossible at an earlier point in time. Goethe writes that the protagonist, Doctor Faust, "plans to speculate with the elements. This is his longing day and night, with eagle's wings he wanted to explore all reason behind heaven and

⁴⁵ <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/har/faust.htm>. 21 March 2003.

earth."⁴⁶ Thus greed for neither riches nor life's joys is his driving force, but his longing for knowledge. Since he cannot satisfy his longing any other way, he makes a pact with the one who promises to answer his questions. Essentially, in exchange for knowledge, Faust forfeits his life and soul.

Brandl's first piece that exclusively dealt with the theme of Faust was *Faust; Les Sortilèges*. It was exhibited at Galerie Christiane Chassay in Montreal in 1993. The second piece, *Faust ou La Tentation du Possible*, was exhibited in the same gallery in 1997. Brandl's installations on the subject of Faust consist of elaborate sculptural installations that combine numerous elements of both philosophical and biographical content. For *Faust; Les Sortilèges*, I am combining information obtained from Brandl during the interview with a text by Michael Molter, which appeared in *Espace* magazine in the summer of 1994.⁴⁷ For *Faust ou La Tentation du Possible*, I am relying on Brandl's analysis of the piece during the interview, in conjunction with a description of the piece provided by Serge Fissette in a 1997 article from *Espace*.⁴⁸

Faust; Les Sortilèges

Faust; Les Sortilèges (fig. 4.4) consists of three main components that come together to form one installation in Galerie Christiane Chassay. The largest component is *Les Errances*, the two smaller components are *Le Drame du Savant* and *Interlude d'Hélène*. All three are made up of a number of sculptural elements

⁴⁶ Eric Trunz, ed., *Faust*, by Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1790; reprint, Munich: Verlag CH. Beck, 1987). My translation of commentary by Erich Trunz from chapters 2 and 6.

⁴⁷ Michael Molter, "Eva Brandl: *Faust; les Sortilèges*," *Espace*, 28 (Summer 1994): 23-26.

⁴⁸ Serge Fissette. "The Hidden and the Revealed," *Espace*, 40 (Summer 1997): 18-23.

that Brandl produced in her Clark street studio over a period of a year and a half and later combined in the exhibition of the piece.

The first component, *Les Errances*, consists of the elongated form of a segmented table that is installed on a slope (the segments are on a descent) (fig. 4.5). The table has been constructed from maple wood. It forms a semi-circle in the main part of the gallery, implying a spiral movement that goes on forever. Displayed on the table's surface are a variety of objects. These flat, sculptural objects are made of stone. Each of them has the image of a cross inscribed onto them. In addition to the stone objects, a bronze sphere has been placed near the end of the sloping table. It appears that the sphere, or globe, is on its course downward. As Brandl explains:

The main part of this work is *Les Errances*. *Les Errances* means to err: knowing where you go, but going blindly. The succession of tables is descending in a kind of spiral. They have these stones on them, and the stones have engravings. Each stone is engraved with a cross, but not necessarily a perfect cross. It looks like a rope around a package. The stones with the crosses differ from each other – some are granite, some slate. There is a ball, a very heavy bronze ball. It looks like it's on a kind of descent. The whole thing is on its course. In "Faust" you have that quest for knowledge that is very strong. The piece has no real beginning and no end, just like a spiral. This ball finds its way through, it finds its own course. The cross functions like a marker: you've gone through that one, you passed by here, you've put a mark there. The cross is never something simple, like a Christian cross. It is much more a universal sign. It could allude to humanity if you want. This cross is made of different metals: copper, zinc, lead. The ball, the sphere also comes back. The sphere symbolizes completion, something complete in itself.

The second part of *Faust*; *Les Sortilèges* is behind the main component (fig. 4.6). It is called *Le Drame du Savant*, the savant's drama. *Le Drame du Savant* consists of three large, sculptural objects. According to critic Michael Molter, they are not readily translatable, but appear to refer to a "delusion with knowledge." The first object is a bronze cone, implying both the circumvention of things and stability. The second component is a geometrical piece of sculpture, an aluminium polyhedron, which is a reference to Albrecht Dürer's *Melancholia*, a calendar with

signs and numbers. The third object is a wooden staircase, which alludes both to infinity and continuous descent. Brandl summarized *Le Drame du Savant* by saying that it consists of Dürer, a ladder, and a compass: "It all has to do with knowledge – the drama of the one who seeks knowledge."

The third part of the installation, *Interlude d'Hélène*, has two elements: a black-and-white photograph on a wooden desk and a large cast-iron element resembling a stylized acorn (fig. 4.7). The photograph on the table is on a parchment scroll, a reference to learning. It depicts an oak leaf, which is photographed in a way that makes it appear three-dimensional. The large acorn shape on the floor next to the desk is engraved with the words "the world and the ball, both flee and fall, it ringeth like glass, how brittle alas," an excerpt from Goethe's *Faust*, "the Witches' Kitchen."

Brandl's preoccupation in this installation is not only with a German theme, but with a fictional German character who exchanges his life and soul for knowledge. According to Michael Molter, Eva Brandl's interest in Faust stems from the artist's constant curiosity concerning her own background and cultural origins. Molter suggests that this is an element that is pervasive in her work as a missing link she is drawn to investigate. In the context of Germany's Third Reich past, the search for knowledge can be a difficult and even frightening undertaking, but for Brandl the search continues. On several occasions, Brandl has used the symbol of the oak leaf in her work. In *Faust; Les Sortilèges* she uses both the symbol of an oak leaf on a parchment scroll, and an acorn, from which the oak tree grows. The oak typically symbolizes Germany. Already prior to Nazi Germany, the oak had generally stood for pride in being German. Oak leaves were used in much of the decorum of the Third Reich and the highest military honours were decorated with them. It is therefore hard to avoid the connection of oak leaves to Nazi Germany, at

least for me. In my interview with her, Brandl explained her personal connection to the symbol of the oak leaf, a symbol she frequently uses in her installations:

It's a symbol for German pride. I think it has to do with the strong symbolism Germans attach to the oak leaf. My mother tells me that the Hitler Youth had them on their uniforms. But none of this is really conscious. I went to the beach in the fall, and it was covered with oak leaves. I collected them and one day I decided that I should cast them. I believe that there is a lot of the subconscious in that. As an artist, the subconscious makes you do what you do. When you ask me what is behind it, I don't have a black-and-white answer. Some people dwell more consciously on the past. I think in my work it's really latent.

From this perspective, *Les Sortilèges* may be viewed as an effort to consciously address issues that are pertinent to Germany's past, while allowing this latent material to surface.

Faust ou la Tentation du Possible

Brandl's second piece that focuses exclusively on the theme of Faust was completed and exhibited in 1996. Upon entering the gallery, the viewer encounters four identical structures, pedestals which are reminiscent of pulpits (fig. 4.8). They are lined up next to each other at equal distances and partially covered with fabrics of various colours (red, ochre, navy-blue and black). As Brandl says of them,

These pulpits stand for knowledge. In medieval times you used to stand at a pulpit to study, so they are at that perfect chest height. They also look like altars because they're draped with different coloured cloth. The feel of the fabric was very important, how it falls, the sensuality of it. Each pulpit has a sign, and the sign is the deconstruction of the cross.

In front of the four pulpits, symmetrically aligned with them, are four wooden structures, reminiscent of prayer stools. Each stool features another blanket, which is neatly folded up and matches the colour of the blanket-like fabric that covers the pulpit it faces. According to Brandl, "Although nobody ever kneels on a stool or sits on it, the stools are meditative, but the cloth is too well folded for you to want to unfold it."

On the pulpits, Brandl has placed four small, sculptural elements made of felt that look like signs (fig. 4.9). On the wall opposite the pulpits, a painted version of the signs is displayed (fig. 4.10). They have been painted onto four pieces of paper and affixed to panels that lean against the wall. Together the signs form a cross, reminiscent of the human form. The signs also appear to be a deconstruction of the word "exit."

Further into the gallery, the viewer encounters a large sculptural object, reminiscent of a child's toy: a top used for spinning (fig. 4.11). The top is placed on the floor next to a photograph depicting two hands. The hands in the image are not attached to a body and they hold a sphere; or rather, the sphere appears to be slipping forward and out of the hands. The top lies on its side, as if it has just finished spinning.

The last element of the installation is set apart from the rest of the piece, in another small room of the gallery, adjacent to the main exhibition space (fig. 4.12). In the centre of the small room, a sculptural object reminiscent of a miniature theatre stage is placed on a pedestal. The stage is partially enclosed in a rotunda. Inside the rotunda the viewer encounters a small figure, standing in for the figure of Faust. It is a small wooden puppet, a model used by artists to practise their skills of drawing the human figure.

The puppet's eyes are covered by a headband that renders the figure blind. Light is projected onto the rotunda from above, and the puppet has its arms raised as if it was trying to protect itself from the light. The structure of the stage is made of vertical panels of different heights. Its back is covered with purple fabric, reminiscent of a stage curtain. A bronze band has been drawn around the stage and makes it difficult to see the protagonist. The only way to view the puppet is by coming close and looking in from above. In the same small room, the title of the installation is written onto the wall in red letters. Brandl has clothed the puppet in

grey felt, in another allusion to Joseph Beuys. She describes the installation in the small room as follows:

A little *théâtre du monde* – a little world theatre – with its protagonist in the centre. When you approached you could not really see him because of the golden band that surrounds it. Because of the curtain, you had to look underneath to find him. He is clothed like a little puppet. In a way he is Beuys, because he wears a grey felt suit. He is a dressed-up drawing mannequin. His eyes are blindfolded, and he's in a gesture as if the light were too strong for him. He's blinded by a sort of excess, or by the impossibility of reaching something. He becomes very symbolic, an abstract. These are very abstract pieces, yet he is also a puppet, a kind of substitute. He is really isolated in his rotunda, on this *Sockel* (pedestal). He is all by himself, the lonely actor.

Perhaps because the work is so purposefully multifaceted and complex, a detailed interpretation of *Faust ou la Tentation du Possible* appears impossible. Serge Fissette in *Espace* notes accordingly:

The work is not precisely related to a theme, does not have established roots, but originates from a perpetual calling into question. The completed work is never more than an instant, it is ephemeral and fragmentary, the pursuit of a quest, where the failure to resolve it leads to an insatiable and unquenchable thirst.⁴⁹

In Brandl's experience of growing up as a post-war German, she learned that one could never ask outright: what happened here? Even if you dared to ask, you would likely not get an answer, or you'd get an answer but not be told the truth. And even if you were told the truth, there was a distinct possibility that you might not want to know it because, in a way, it could cost you your soul in the form of your peace of mind. The quest for knowledge for a second-generation German about Germany's recent modern past is a difficult and tricky quest. If you pursue it in depth, you might put yourself at risk, like Faust does in his quest for knowledge. Third Reich Germans did, indeed, make a pact with the devil. Like Mephistopheles in *Faust*, Hitler offered those who signed the pact unlimited prospects for the exchange of their life and souls. Like Faust's downfall, which was caused by his deal

⁴⁹ Fissette, 18.

with the devil, Third Reich Germans caused their own downfall by signing a pact with Hitler. And their downfall has bequeathed a difficult legacy for subsequent generations of Germans – the need to know the impossible: how the Holocaust could have been allowed to happen. Brandl's quest for knowledge is very much informed by this second-generation legacy.

According to Serge Fissette, there's a parallel between Brandl's intellectual and elaborate, time-consuming, artistic process and that of Goethe's Faust, in that their quest is similarly excessive. Fissette relates the intensity of their quest to the German term *Streben*, which refers to research that is both intense and absolute. But it is important to also understand that *Sterben*, to die, is an anagram to *Streben*. Faust will do anything in order to achieve his goal, even risk his salvation by selling his soul to Mephistopheles in exchange for knowledge and worldly goods. But after having exhausted all the branches of learning, Faust is still unable to find the truth: "He decides, then, to resort to magic to finally uncover the mystery of life, to understand the reason and the meaning of the world."⁵⁰ Like Faust, Eva Brandl is engaged in *Streben* in her labour-intensive, intricate installations. Maybe they are so difficult to lock into an interpretation because, like Faust, she resorts to a kind of magic in creating her mystical sculptural pieces. The magic they give off, however, lures us in and invites us to consider difficult questions.

After viewing the main component of *Faust ou la Tentation du Possible* on slides during my interview with Brandl, I noticed a curious detail, the colours of the German flag (i.e., black, red, and ochre) on top of her pulpits. I suggested that although the flag's reference in this detail may not have occurred to Brandl, for me it was immediately and clearly present. Brandl laughed before she gave the following response:

⁵⁰ Fissette, 18.

Well, at one point I saw that, after the fact. There is an interesting aspect to it – I'll open the doors for you a little bit. In my household we lived a lot amongst crates, as we didn't have much furniture. My father had these big, really well-built plywood boxes, which contained all our belongings, because we never knew when we would leave again. So things were not totally taken out of these crates, but my mother, to make things more homey, put these very heavy woollen blankets on the crates so they'd look like sofas. These blankets were of solid, very solid, colours. This was part of our environment. And now that you mention the German flag, it's still there, at my father's place: a crate, it has a blanket on top of it, and in the corner there's a German flag, which he has sown himself! But this came to me after the fact. I think the piece was already in an exhibition when I walked in one day and I thought: damn! Here they are, the crates are here! I just saw them in a glimpse ... although they were not really blankets, I remember the fabric, like army blankets – it had wool in it.

The themes of Brandl's work may generally be apparent to the viewer: an encounter with an ideal place and its destruction and loss in *The Golden Gates*, transformation and the delusion inherent to progress in *Model for a Temple of Reason*, and the search for knowledge and its potential cost in both the installations on the theme of Faust. What becomes evident under close inspection, and in familiarizing oneself with Brandl's childhood past, is the fact that her works clearly draw on her experiences as a post-war German child, and consequently as a second-generation German artist. This is evident in her use of the boat as a reference to childhood experiences in *The Golden Gates*; her use of the smelter in *Model for a Temple of Reason* as a critique of how modern progress led to Auschwitz; her use of the oak leaf as a symbol for both German pride and its downfall in *Faust*; *Les Sortilèges*, and her use of the shipping crates, the German flag, and army blanket fabric in reference to post-war Germany in *Faust ou la Tentation du Possible*.

Much of the symbolism that Brandl employs in her art practice appears to confirm that her subconscious influences the construction of her artworks. On the other hand, her use of a design by a German architect in *Model for a Temple of Reason*, her references to Joseph Beuys in both *Les Sortilèges* and *La Tentation du*

Possible, her inclusion of a reference to Dürer in *Le Drame du Savant*, and her use of German text on the *Model for a Temple of Reason*, are clearly conscious links, placing her work in a German context. Thus, German biographical content constantly enters into the philosophical concerns of her artwork.

In the evolution of Eva Brandl's art practice, there is a lack of drama in her pieces about Faust in comparison to her earlier pieces. The artist engages in more conscious efforts to bring her questioning of her native country into a setting that focuses on content, rather than on the seduction of her audience. The seductive qualities of her earlier *The Golden Gates* is reminiscent of the Third Reich decorum, which was highly decorative and used strategic lighting and special effects on stage-like sets. Her more recent pieces might be viewed as a more effective vehicle through which to approach Germany's past, for the way they allow the audience to come to their own conclusions about the meaning of the pieces at a safe distance for contemplation, rather than being immediately swallowed by the work's dramatic properties.

Perhaps this need for a safe distance, this reluctance to be overwhelmed by drama, can be seen in Brandl's initial attempt to distance herself from her German origins. For example, when I asked Brandl what her reaction was to being researched in the context of second-generation German visual art, she replied:

My first reaction is to say that I'm not a German artist. I don't think that the effects of World War II and the Holocaust influence my work. I don't see the direct influences, but I would have to add: I don't see it, but maybe it does, very deep down, maybe it does. I think that there is definitely something German in this work that I don't deny. But does it come directly from there? Yes, my parents lived through this, and yes, my parents are a product of it. But can I really understand it? It's like a story I've been told.

The stories that Brandl has been told about Germany are clearly in conflict because they are stories about both pride and shame. Brandl confirms that she is conflicted about her feelings towards Germany's past:

Sometimes I'm terribly proud to be German, and sometimes I'm embarrassed. I experienced that recently, when I saw that movie I told you about, *Aimée und Jaguar*.⁵¹ I really like to see German movies. There is a kind of privilege there, I understand something that a non-German does not see the same way. Yes, there is that great work that came out of Germany but at the same time – my god – that quite unbelievable too.

It is only in her work that the contradictory stories can make sense side by side. Like the character of Faust, Eva Brandl has been hungry for knowledge and determined in her quest. But unlike that tragic figure, Brandl is wary about the price and source of knowledge.

⁵¹ *Aimée und Jaguar*. Max Färberböck's award-winning debut film from 2000, based on a true story about two lesbians in Third Reich Berlin, one of them Gentile, the other Jewish German.

CHAPTER 5

Katja Kessin

Appropriated by the Holocaust

In my discussion of second-generation German visual art, I am including a chapter on my own art practice because it served as the point of departure for my research. In order to keep my method of analysis consistent with the one I applied to the other artists, I supplement the discussion of my work with quotes drawn from Loren Lerner's interviews with me, which she has made available for this purpose. These interviews were conducted on 7 and 20 March 2000.

I was born in Hamburg, Germany, in 1959. The Germany of my 1960s childhood offered numerous reminders of its recent World-War past. Bombing damage to city buildings was still visible. Grass-covered "mountains" made of war rubble were common playgrounds. Shack-like housing for the bombed-out and displaced people had been erected everywhere. Adult behaviour – the hard-work ethic and thriftiness so common in the 1950s and '60s – stemmed primarily from the recent war. Grandfathers (and uncles) were practically extinct. Fathers had been soldiers and prisoners of war and did not like to speak of their experiences. Our schoolbooks were censored by the Allies. My toys bore strange imprints: "Made in US-Zone of Germany." The subject of the Holocaust was taboo, even if this was never stated outright. The taboo was so strong that even our strongest fears did not prompt questions. After I read documentary literature from concentration camps as a child, I feared that our parchment and pressed butterfly lampshade was made of human skin. Yet I would rather live with that terror than seek verbal reassurance.

We thought of our parents as average people, but we also knew that the aggressors of the Second World War had to have come from somewhere. Were our parents like werewolves then, putting on a human face in front of their children,

only to rip off their masks at night while devouring the neighbours? Because our parents did not speak of their experiences to their children, we children decided not to trust them with our thoughts. Television and international media taught us that Germans were essentially bad people. If we chose to identify with Germany, we were automatically “bad” ourselves. Although I didn’t understand it at the time, this untenable double bind was, essentially, the cause of my emigration. By the time I was eighteen, I left the country behind and emigrated to Canada.

Over the years I used art to release some of the skeletons that had secretly followed me. I also used art to gain back a sense of self-worth and to question Germany’s past. Today it serves as a means to communicate with others – and myself. The physical distance I created between myself and my native country allows me a double perspective on Germany’s “modern” history. When I look back at the development of my art practice – and how I chose to implement it – the works of Leo Haas and Eva Kessin, my earliest art influences, feature prominently. A therapist once suggested that, had I not turned to art early on, I might have become schizophrenic instead. That is, rather than splitting into several personalities, I was enabled, with the help of art, to identify with two individuals who seemingly came from enemy camps, my uncle and my mother. Their very existence was living proof to me that simple categories such as black and white, good and evil, and Jewish and German did not hold true in real life and that art is essential to human existence.

My uncle Leo Haas (1901-1983), a German Jew born in Czechoslovakia, married into the family after World War II. During the war he had been interned in numerous labour and concentration camps, among them Theresienstadt and Auschwitz. In Theresienstadt – the notorious “paradise ghetto” that Hitler had given as a “gift to the Jews” – Leo and his artist friends were forced to produce graphic materials for the Nazis. But at night they secretly used their access to art materials to produce documentary drawings of life in the camps; they attempted to smuggle

these drawings out of Theresienstadt to make the world aware of the horrors that were taking place behind the camp walls. When they were caught, they were brought to Auschwitz, but not without having hidden some of their tale-telling works in the camp's walls and grounds. The artists soon met their deaths, except for Leo. He was spared at the last minute and brought to the Sachsenhausen camp, where his graphic skills were needed in the Nazi attempt to undermine British currency through counterfeiting the British pound note.⁵² When Leo was liberated in 1945, he found that most of his family members and friends had perished. One of the first things he did was to return to Theresienstadt, where he retrieved the documentary drawings. They were later used as evidence in the trials against the notorious war criminal, Adolf Eichmann. From the originals, most of which Leo donated to Holocaust museums in Israel and the United States, he created a series of lithographs entitled *From German Concentration Camps* in 1946 (fig 5.1).

One of his portfolios ended up in my parents' house, where my father showed the works to us children without much further explanation. The images depicted camp inmates digging in the garbage for scraps of food, being shot or hanging on gallows they had been forced to build, and lining up for the transport "east" to the Auschwitz gas chambers; there were also images of the piles of naked and emaciated corpses. After the war, Leo Haas settled down in East Berlin, where he became a political cartoonist and educator about the Holocaust. His decision to remain in Germany made him part of a minority among surviving German Jews and he was often harshly criticized for his decision to stay. In his cartoons he fervently supported East Germany by cutting down both the United States and West Germany. In the years preceding his death, however, he became more and more disillusioned with the new German state that he had once believed in. His

⁵² Wagner, Wolf H. *Der Hölle entronnen*. (GDR Berlin: Henschelverlag Kunst und Gesellschaft, 1987).

documentary works depicting life in the concentration camps had been widely exhibited in the former east-block countries but had never been overseas. In 1995, years after Leo's death, I brought his works from Germany to Montreal for a fifty-year anniversary exhibition of the closing of European concentration camps.

My mother, Eva Kessin (1926-1993), spent her childhood in the Germany of Hitler's Third Reich. Her father was an artist and World War I veteran who was too old to be drafted into the army in the Second World War and who, as a Freemason, was not recruitable by "The Party." Eva, inspired by her father's paintings, excelled in art from an early age. As a teenager, she was channelled into the elite school system, which had been created by the Nazis in order to produce highly qualified professionals for a superior Germany. Although her carefully rendered, realistic drawings were much to the liking of her professors, her favourite piece of art was Franz Marc's *Blue Horses*, a reproduction of which she guiltily hid in her schoolbooks. (Marc's art had been deemed degenerate by the Nazis and was therefore prohibited.) In 1945, at the end of the war, my mother was eighteen years old and ready to study art in Danzig. Instead, when her father was killed by the Russian invaders, she fled West Prussia together with her mother and mentally handicapped older brother. In the couple of suitcases they were permitted to take with them, she had packed her school portfolio of drawings. After a lengthy ordeal, the allied military government stationed them as DPs – displaced persons – near the city of Hamburg. In the end, my mother and grandmother were the only survivors of the family: the younger of her two brothers had been killed in 1942 at the Russian front at age nineteen.

Her handicapped brother, as a German, was refused proper medical care by the Allied military government at the end of the war and subsequently died of typhoid. This refusal of care was particularly ironic, considering how difficult it had been for the family to save the boy from Hitler's extermination camps for the

mentally handicapped. Eventually my mother became a schoolteacher, and among other subjects she taught art to children. In the 1950s she married my father, himself a Hamburg native who as a teenager had lived through the blanket bombings in that city. He had been a soldier and fought at the Russian and Western front and was interned as a prisoner of war in Scotland and England after the war.

We were four children at home. Often our mother showed us her old portfolio. The drawings in it depicted a seemingly perfect world: *BDM* girls (*Bund Deutscher Mädel* – female Hitler youth) planting flowers and swastika-sporting *NSV* men (the Third Reich equivalent of the Salvation Army collecting money for the poor) (fig. 5.2). Her post-war drawings, rendered during a time of starvation, poverty, and utter despair, depicted women in ball gowns or elaborately illustrated fairy stories. Although my mother later dabbled in the arts, she never fulfilled her dream of becoming a professional artist. Until her death in 1993, she remained very suspicious of the artworks I produced, as they often dealt with the dark side of life.

Although my art, both subconsciously and consciously, is fuelled by the impact of the Third Reich, World War II, and the Holocaust, it has functioned in a constructive manner to change a potentially destructive impact into the force necessary to initiate positive change. Already as a small child, I was intensively engaged in visual art practice, and knew how to draw before I knew how to speak properly. After I immigrated to Canada as a young adult, my visual art practice became more and more a way to express myself, likely because I had lost regular access to my mother tongue. Because I felt that, in English, my ability to express myself was limited, my art practice slowly became a necessary means of self-expression.

I first came to Montreal as a guest student in Fine Arts at John Abbott College in 1977, and then officially emigrated to Canada in 1981. In 1985 I received a Bachelor's degree in Studio Arts and in 1993 a Master's degree in Painting from

Concordia University. My art practice includes painting, installation, performance, video, and writing. It often draws on childhood experience and explores socially accepted forms of violence. In these explorations, I am specifically looking at connections between the home environment and large-scale acts of violence, especially as it is exemplified in Hitler's Third Reich and the resulting Holocaust.

During the last fifteen years I have established myself as a professional artist. My work has been exhibited in Canada as well as Germany. For the past decade I've taught Fine Arts in Montreal. My teaching venues include Concordia University, but also a local women's shelter where I coordinated art workshops over a period of three years. The production of art that is purely aesthetic holds little interest for me in my own art practice. Instead, I see my art as a means to explore, to communicate with, and to have an impact on the society I live in and am part of. Throughout my formal art education, my teachers asked me to dedicate my life to art. As a mother of three, rather than accepting this unreasonable demand, I decided to dedicate my art to life instead.

In order to discuss my evolution as an artist in the context of second-generation German art, I have selected a few key artworks for analysis. They illuminate my progress from a subconscious to a conscious engagement with the subject matter of the Second World War, the Third Reich, and the Holocaust.

Analysis of Works

The subject matter of my first series of large-scale acrylic paintings, which I produced in the mid-1980s, was entirely unpremeditated. I worked without sketches, grids, or photos – even without precise ideas. Instead I painted directly onto the canvas, whatever came to my mind at the moment. My first paintings came seemingly straight from my unconscious. They were a series of allegorical images replete with an iconography that related to the subject of violence,

destruction, war, and death. In my first exhibit of large-scale paintings in 1988, the gallery space seemed to be flooded with skulls, wolves, knives, and German flags.

Encore Anyone?, an acrylic painting on canvas from 1987, provides a prime example of such an unpremeditated work (fig. 5.3). The canvas measures approximately four by five feet. It depicts a theatre stage that features a curtain in the colours of the German flag in the background. In front of the curtain, two actors – a skeleton and a black angel – hold hands. They appear to be dancing. A black bird is perched on their joined hands, ready for take-off. The bird merges the look of an eagle with that of a vulture. Behind the figures is a wooden boat, and inside the boat is a bouquet of blood-red poppies.

Encore Anyone? is an allegorical image, a portrait of German history. In retrospect it is evident to me that the painting was a subconscious effort to challenge my perception of my position as a second-generation German in Canada. As a newly emigrated German, I had encountered numerous situations in which my German background had provoked adverse commentaries and a general questioning of my integrity as a human being. I think that, at least unconsciously, I had tried to escape the legacy of Germany's Third Reich past by emigrating to Canada, so with the title *Encore Anyone?* I attempted to challenge potential attacks on my integrity as a German. The title cautions that, if Germanness is conflated with evil, the options for young people in search of a national and individual identity are slim. This reduction of options may, in turn, result in a self-fulfilling prophecy. In the depiction of the boat in the painting, I evoked the metaphor "we're all in the same boat" because I saw the need for cooperation in order for the boat, our precarious post-Holocaust, pre-nuclear-war environment, not to sink.

My 1988 exhibit under the same title also featured other works that were indicative of my entanglement in the legacy of the Third Reich, and of a revolt against the prejudiced treatment my German background seemed to provoke in

Canada. Audience reactions, however, suggest that instead of challenging the status quo, with the exhibit *Encore Anyone?* I had further seduced the viewer into an adoration of the very imagined German brutality I had set out to challenge. Entries in the exhibition's comment book included the suggestion I should stop reading comics in order to escape my nightmares, and an invitation to sexual intercourse, based on the apparent brute force of the imagery.

In 1988 I received a carte-blanc invitation to put together an exhibit of my then figurative paintings for a Westmount gallery that was looking for new artists. At that time, the subject matter of the Holocaust and the Third Reich was neither overtly present in my work, nor consciously planned. One of the works I intended to hang was *The German Shepherd* (fig. 5.4), an acrylic painting on canvas from 1988, measuring approximately two-and-a-half by three feet. I had been impressed by a photograph depicting Hitler and his German shepherd, Blondie, which I had seen on television. In the photograph, it is Hitler who appears to be a slight and timid man, whereas the dog looks potentially dangerous. In viewing the image, it struck me how often we misconstrue real danger – an observation I used as a point of departure for *The German Shepherd*.

Rather than painting an accurate portrait of Hitler and his dog, I captured my general memories of the photo on canvas. (My children actually thought at the time that I had painted a portrait of their father!) Despite the fact that the figure in the painting did not really look like Hitler, because of his moustache and the painting's title, it was still possible to come to the conclusion that, in fact, the portrait was of Hitler. The title, *The German Shepherd*, served as a referent to the difficulties we face in distinguishing actual dangers from empty threats. In the painting the dog, who is sporting sharp teeth, appears to be dangerous, yet he poses no threat. It is the timid-looking man who is the actual danger, a wolf hiding in a sheep's skin: it is Hitler in the early years of his reign, before his brutality on all

fronts became blatantly obvious. *The German Shepherd* was my critique of Hitler's grandiose self-image as well as of the general political stance of Third-Reich Germans, which was that of a flock of sheep led to the slaughter. While hanging the exhibit, I was informed that I could not include this painting "because the gallery had a predominantly Jewish audience." Apparently the gallery's director did not consider the audience capable of approaching the work critically, possibly because it was painted by a German artist. It did not help when I pointed out that I would attend the opening in order to respond to the audience's questions and criticisms. In the end I insisted on my carte-blanche contract and hung the piece. However, the painting was rehung during my absence, and at the opening I found it displayed in a dark corner of the gallery, right next to the bathroom where no one would see it. Without ever having seen the painting, the gallery audience had caused it to be censored.

At that point, I was not yet aware of the predominant underlying issues that my paintings addressed, specifically the Second World War, the Third Reich, and the Holocaust. I thought my obsession with all things German stemmed from my German background alone, rather than from a subconscious entanglement in a legacy of violence. What I discovered through the incident surrounding *The German Shepherd*, however, was that for a German artist there existed a distinct taboo with regards to certain imagery. What had become apparent was the importance placed on the author of a given work in conjunction with the subject of the Third Reich. What also became obvious to me only later was the fact that, if I was going to approach that subject in my art practice successfully, I would have to develop appropriate strategies in order not to alienate my prospective audience.

In 1990 I entered the Master's program in painting at Concordia University. I started to paint a series of large rooms in acrylic on canvasses measuring four feet ten inches by four feet, again without much premeditation. One of the first

paintings I produced that year was *Don't you see that everything's in perfect order?* (fig. 5.5). It was also my last figurative painting in the traditional sense because, from that point onwards, I painted works in which the audience is invited to take the place of the protagonist. *Don't you see that everything's in perfect order?* depicts an imaginary kitchen, which I constructed from memories of my childhood kitchen in Germany, in combination with my actual kitchen in Canada. In the painting an elderly woman sits at a kitchen table. She is wearing a kerchief and dark glasses. In front of her is a round sewing box in which she has neatly arranged her sewing equipment. The perfect order of the sewing box is in stark contrast to the general surroundings of the figure, which are in total disarray. In the interviews with Loren Lerner I explained painting's meaning like this:

In this painting I wanted to do a kitchen – not just any kitchen, but a compilation, a construct of several kitchens: my childhood kitchen and the kitchen I lived in when my kids were small. The woman is a construct as well. My mother was the model, the body and the clothing are my dead grandmother's, and the hands are mine. Several kitchens from several time zones and several people are collapsed into one. The painting is called *Don't you see that everything's in perfect order?* but there is absolute chaos around the central figure, nothing is in order. You can see Hitler feeding a deer, and a little cup with the word *ezra* in it, which I was later told is Hebrew and means "help." In the kitchen there is a garbage bag that looks like the upside-down head of the woman. The painting has similar disturbances hidden everywhere. It is very representative of how I must have felt about Germany's past, and my own childhood in Germany. In the sewing box in front of the woman, everything might have been put in order, but in the larger sense absolutely nothing was in order. I painted this in my first year as a graduate student. It became the first piece in a series of the same name. I did not plan on it, but several of these paintings turned out to be paintings of the Holocaust, World War II, and the Third Reich.

Don't you see that everything's in perfect order? was the first of several works in which I addressed the subject of Nazi Germany without my conscious intention. It became the first painting in a series of acrylic paintings of the same size, which were exhibited under the same title in 1991. One of these paintings in particular provided a turning point for me. *Baking Little Men* from 1991 also depicts a German kitchen (fig. 5.6). Again it is a construct of my memories of various kitchens, a

combination of images derived from fantasy with images accurately copied from actual objects. It was my first painting that was entirely void of the human figure in its traditional portrayal. The painting was loosely based on a family narrative, in which my older sister at the age of one had turned on the oven and baked her plastic baby toys on a cookie sheet until they melted and contorted. In the painting, however, despite the title and my obvious intent of illustrating a harmless family narrative, there is no evidence that the original, conscious intent has in fact been carried out:

I thought I wanted to recapture a story I'd been told as a child, a happy family story. The key story is about "baking little men." It is based on an event where my older sister, who was little more than one year old, was at home alone with my mother. All of a sudden my mother smelled a really horrible smell. She followed the smell to the kitchen, and saw smoke coming from the oven. She tore it open and found a cookie sheet with those baby toys you strap in front of a baby carriage so that when the baby pulls on the toy, it rattles. My sister had turned on the oven, copying the adults. She put the toys on the cookie sheet, shoved it into the oven, and closed the door. She nearly set the house on fire. When my mother said, "What have you done?" she answered, "Baking little men." The first stimulus for the painting was this story, nothing more, nothing heavy. Just starting a new canvas without anything much in mind. Then all these secrets started to reveal themselves that I was not consciously aware of.

Although my original intent had been to paint an essentially happy story, I ended up painting a work on the Holocaust. This, however, became evident to me only during a studio visit when a colleague pointed out the painting's relevance with regards to the history of Nazi Germany's concentration camps. In fact, the painting did not look harmless or happy after all. Painted in a combination of sombre brown tones and blood red, it had a distinct sinister undertone. Among the objects on display was a copy of one of my first self-portraits as a child. It appears to have its head cut off by a pair of scissors in a drawer nearby. The dough bowl on the kitchen table is partially covered by a dark kerchief imprinted with skulls. We cannot see what is hidden in the bowl, but one can assume that it's not dough. The cookie sheet does not feature a baby's rattle, but a row of gingerbread men. One of

them has been mutilated. Its leg is missing, probably bitten off by the alligator-shaped oven mitt lying next to the cookie sheet:

In conjunction with all this my friend said: "Don't you find it uncanny that you are German, and that all these elements are present? I read this as a painting about the Holocaust." It just hit me over the head, the moment she said that. It was as if I should have known that when I painted it; but then again, I never would have painted this, had I known that! This was an eye-opening experience and from then on I very consciously did not avoid the subject matter (of the Third Reich). When it creeps up in an idea or a painting, I now try to look at it from several angles, trying to use it in a constructive way. Rather than creating representations of violence, I now try to see if I could not go a little further, challenging a thought or thinking through my own thought systems: anything other than just replicating violence.

Baking Little Men was a key work for my evolution as a second-generation German visual artist. The piece made it evident that, underneath my verbal language, a visual language was functioning independently: "It was like I was producing something in a language that I must have learned at some point in time, but I couldn't read it, because I had forgotten the language." The painting illustrated the socially accepted forms of violence I perceived as a child growing up in Germany and conflated them with my early knowledge of the sinister aspects of German history: the oven door in the painting is open – it stands for the crematoria of Auschwitz. From that point onwards I paid attention to and attempted to decipher the alternate language that had made itself apparent in my early, unpremeditated works: "You know how you can unscramble something on the computer? You get an attachment in the wrong language, and you can press a button? It was like that. I was able to read all of these images that I had produced, from one minute to the other. From that moment on, I have been able to decipher them."

Faced with the fact that my subconscious had the apparent desire to approach the legacy of Nazi Germany, I did not fight it, but decided to approach the subject of the Third Reich head-on. In doing so, I was now looking for a visual language that would address my concerns overtly rather than obscurely.

Consequently, in my subsequent series of paintings, I painted an image depicting the largest swastika I could get away with, both from a painterly and political point of view. I was long aware of the fact that the depiction of a swastika is unconstitutional in Germany. As an artist working in Canada, however, I decided to make it the central focus of a painting. The resulting painting, *To Dear Mother* from 1992, was first exhibited in *Memories Slightly Altered* in 1993, which was my Master's thesis exhibit. The exhibit displayed a series of four feet ten by four feet acrylic paintings, all of which dealt with my experiences of growing up in post-war Germany.

In painting *To Dear Mother* (fig. 5.7), I was interested in finding out what kind of censorship a painting, although critical of German history, would receive in Canada, merely for featuring a swastika. In approaching the legacy of the Third Reich outright, I decided that the swastika would be the strongest referent possible. I did not want my subject to be obscure to a Canadian audience, and I was willing to face the risk of censorship. If I was going to paint a swastika, however, it had to be the central focus of the image, as the swastika holds a focal position in the history of Germany. So the painting, *To Dear Mother*, depicts a room that is devoid of the human figure. It has been painted from a bird's-eye perspective. The room depicted is loosely based on my grandmother's room in my parents' house. It is painted mainly in brown and red colours against a dark blue background. The room features a sofa, a cupboard, a chest of drawers, a stool, and a carpet. A large, blood-red swastika forms the centre of the carpet. The carpet's border sports a design made of skulls. The door of the cupboard stands slightly ajar. A key with a small swastika is visible in the lock of the door. The single window of the room is covered by curtains, which are decorated with skulls as well. A needle has been fastened to the curtain, from which a thin, red thread is extended like a trickle of blood.

On display throughout the room are a vase decorated with a romantic-looking angel, a heart-shaped gingerbread cookie with the words *Der lieben Mutti* (to dear Mother) that hangs on the wall, and a photograph of my grandmother as a seventeen-year-old girl. As a child, I was raised by my grandmother. Although she lost many of her family members in both World War I and World War II, she was not a politically engaged individual. The painting questions the role of the silent bystander, who finds herself in between the positions of victim and perpetrator. My work was a critique of a neutral position in a situation of conflict. It suggests that events in the Third Reich might have taken a different course, had women shown a greater political responsibility, and had there been no silent bystanders in Nazi Germany. Rather than merely pointing a finger at Third Reich Germans though, the painting addressed my own need for political involvement. Through the bird's-eye perspective I employed, and by leaving the painting empty of the human figure, I attempted to literally make the viewer of the piece "fall" into the painting, taking on the role of the protagonist. My hope was that the audience would question their own political involvement in the present, rather than looking at the painting in the context of Germany's past alone.

Although I had knowingly painted a controversial image, I was initially afraid to hang this particular work, as I feared hurtful commentaries and attack. To my surprise, both the exhibit (*Memories Slightly Altered*) at the Montreal gallery Dare-Dare in 1994, and the painting, *To Dear Mother*, received positive responses from the audience. The exhibit provided the starting point to my conscious public engagement with Germany's past. My work now became reflective of my need to investigate and share the complex history of Germany, particularly the legacy of Nazi Germany, with my audience. It was a need I had by then become aware of, but my concerns were not necessarily conveyable or understandable by verbal communication alone. Using my art practice as a vehicle through which to

approach the subject of the Third Reich was the result of my efforts to circumvent what I perceived as a general verbal taboo. My need to communicate was both personal and political. Thus my art combined my family's history with that of Third Reich Germany. As my paintings in general were highly seductive, due to the technical expertise I had acquired and due to the large amount of detail and familiar objects I employed, I began to look for new artistic processes that would provide more than mere aesthetics.

The sound-installation entitled *Little Rascal* from 1993 was a piece that combined my personal and political needs effectively without relying on visual seduction alone (fig. 5.8). It was included in my thesis exhibit, *Memories Slightly Altered*, and provided the starting point to an interdisciplinary engagement with the subject matter of the Third Reich, both artistically and theoretically. *Little Rascal* started with a found object, an antique radio cabinet. The piece measures approximately four feet in height, two feet in width, and one foot in depth. I furnished the cabinet with a motion detector and installed a tape recorder inside with a sound tape loop. I refurbished the old radio cabinet so that it appeared to be in functioning order when, in fact, the knobs and the speaker consisted of only toothpaste caps and black net stockings. Onto the wooden cabinet I copied a series of frightening images with acrylic paint. They were illustrations that I had selected from a popular German children's book, the *Struwwelpeter*, from 1840:

I used one of the oldest German children's books ever written, by a German psychologist, a medical doctor, who could not find a book that he considered suitable for his child, so he wrote (and illustrated) one himself. That was around 1840. His name is Heinrich Hoffmann. It is translated into countless languages, and sold all over Europe. This was supposed to be educational for children – that was his intent. German children still get the book now, no generation is without this book. The main character's name is Struwwelpeter, "Messy Peter." He is on the front page. He won't comb his hair, he won't cut his nails, and everybody shames him publicly. That is the beginning of the book. It is a collection of five to ten stories about children who don't obey their parents for one reason or another, and they all find their downfall.

When the viewer approaches the radio, a motion detector sets off the sound-tape inside. It plays actual sound footage from my German family, which my parents taped in the early 1960s. A text in a small, ornate frame is displayed on the wall above the radio cabinet. It is a German children's poem entitled "Little Rascal," which was recited to me frequently as a child. I translated it into English for the exhibition of the piece:

Little rascal you, know what I will do?
 I'll stick you in a barley sack and tie a knot for you.
 And if you then still shout: oh please, please, let me out!
 I'll tie an even tighter knot and sit myself on top.

In order to read the text, the audience has to approach the cabinet, which in turn will set off the sound-tape. The German tape is spliced together from two separate sound clips, made to sound as one. On the final version you hear a man, my father, reciting a poem to two very young girls – my sister and me at three and two years of age. The poem tells the story of a girl, *Struwwelliese* or messy Liese – the 1960s' female equivalent of *Struwwelpeter*. When she plays with the radio against her parents' wishes, the radio explodes and Liese's hair is burnt off in punishment for her disobedience. On the sound-tape, the two girls repeat the text after their father and he commends them for their performance. Then at the end of the poem's recital, the audience suddenly and unexpectedly hears the male voice yelling "nein" – no. It appears that he is shouting at a gurgling baby, who has apparently dared to touch the tape recorder.

Although *Little Rascal* has layers of meaning that are not easily accessible to a non-German-speaking audience, it is very effective in questioning authoritative and punitive systems on the whole. It forces the viewer to personally experience the disquieting effect of these systems. Still under the spell of the gentle and rhythmic recital of the poem, the audience is shocked by the sudden yelling, which is clearly decipherable as German even to a non-German audience. Thus the audience itself becomes the target of the verbal attack. The other elements of the piece – the

drawings of the violent stories on the radio cabinet and the disturbing English text on the wall – are easily accessible to the English-speaking audience.

On top of the radio cabinet, I painted a highly detailed doily. It is designed of miniature triangles that come together in the form of a skull in the doily's centre. The audience, intrigued to read the poem, to view the doily, and to get a close look at the images I painted on the cabinet, can do so only by coming close. However, every time the viewer approaches the cabinet to a distance of about a metre, the sound tape is set off anew, and the viewer is forced to listen to the recital of a poem on the disobedience of children and be yelled at in German all over again:

The basic theme is obedience to authority. This piece illustrates that, because it is perfectly quiet (when you are at a distance), but as you near it, you set off the sound tape. People see it from afar and they think: that's a nice piece. But the moment they want to check it out, just like Liese, they get "burned," because the thing starts yelling at them and puts them in shock.

With *Little Rascal* I managed to engage in a broad critique of the kind of socialization that I experienced as a child growing up in post-war Germany. The piece illuminates the violence inherent in authoritative environments, from the family environment all the way to the extermination camps of Auschwitz. Although I am not claiming to have been consciously aware at all times of all the complex processes that came together during the making of this piece, *Little Rascal* was a conscious effort to approach the past, both on the personal and the political level. The processes involved in the making of the piece were neither simply verbal, nor simply theoretical, nor simply visual.

After having exhibited *Memories Slightly Altered* in Canada, I felt the need to address my concerns to a German audience in an art exhibit. My safe distance from Germany had initially enabled me to engage with the subject matter of the Third Reich. The challenge now was to "infiltrate" Germany with its violent history from without. In 1994, the year after I graduated from the Master's program at Concordia and the year after my mother's death, I decided on painting a small-scale series of

canvasses on the legacy of the Third Reich. The smaller scale would make it easy to ship the work to Germany. In order to be accepted for an exhibit, however, I also decided to hide my intent to a certain extent, the intent to undermine from within.

The series *Still Alive*s consists of a series of ten trompe l'oeuil-style acrylic canvasses I painted between 1994 and 1995. The works measure 3.3 feet by 2.4 feet by 1 inch each. The width of the canvas is an important factor in my work. Already in the paintings featured in *Don't you see that everything's in perfect order?* and *Memories Slightly Altered*, I had begun to integrate the sides of my canvasses into my paintings. I used this technique in order to give my painted works a sculptural appearance and, by confirming their object quality, to draw attention to the fact that one is looking at something "real" and not something imagined. I was also using the sides of my canvasses to add hidden secrets to the meaning of a given piece, which were not apparent from a traditional frontal viewing. In *Baking Little Men*, for example, the inclusion of the canvas's sides made it appear to the viewer that one could actually peak into a slightly opened cupboard, in the hope that it might reveal hidden secrets. In *Still Alive*s I furthered the illusion that one is looking at three-dimensional objects rather than at traditional canvasses. That is, a traditional canvas may function like a safe window-view on someone else's imaginary world. But in order to see the paintings in *Still Alive*s properly, the viewer has to interact differently with the works. The paintings have to be approached from a variety of angles, rather than being approachable and decipherable from a safe viewing distance. My artist statement that accompanied the exhibition of *Still Alive*s informed the audience of my general intent:

Within each work, one or more members of my German family are portrayed symbolically. They are represented on canvas via complex compositions of objects that once belonged to them, or may relate to them in another way. The exhibit attempts to re-create their lives by collapsing several decades into each piece. References made stem largely from a Germany of the 1940s, '50s, '60s, the very recent past and the present. Within each painting several individuals or generations may be compiled. These constructs illustrate the impact

that certain ideologies may have had on an individual's life, and how their lives in turn continue to affect others long after their own death, having a cross-generational and, at times, a cross-cultural impact as well. For example, Nazi ideology is celebrating its recent comeback not only in Germany but in the United States and Canada as well.⁵³

*Still Alive*s are paintings of tabletops, upon which objects are arranged that relate to German history, particularly the Third Reich. I had inherited these objects from my mother, after her death in 1993. They had belonged to members of my German family, many of whom had died as a result of the Third Reich. The objects on display generally were artifacts illustrative of Germany's Third Reich history:

This series was done in response to my mother's death. I thought that I could never paint again when she died – I had lost all interest. I thought: what the hell, we have these hundreds of boxes of garbage that nobody wants. Paintings just create more garbage. Who needs it? It's the people you need, and they had all gone. It seemed to make no sense to paint, especially because my mother had always wanted to paint so much. I felt kind of guilty about being alive and being able to paint.

I ended up using many of the artifacts, or "garbage," that I had inherited from my mother, in the painting of *Still Alive*s: "I guess it is impossible to get rid of things like that. What do you do with them? You can't throw them out, and now I have them all here. I shipped ten boxes of this stuff to Canada after my mother died, and most of it got broken during the shipping." Although the *Still Alive*s are not portraits of individuals in the traditional sense – they portray no figures – in their combination of objects they are portraits of my German family, illuminating each personal fate. Most of the works feature a secretly hidden swastika, or shapes reminiscent of swastikas, which I decided to hide in order to get accepted for a show in Germany.

With the inclusion of the swastikas, I set out to challenge the German constitution. The problem I perceived with the unconstitutional swastika and related "fascist imagery" is the fact that the taboo actually makes it difficult to

⁵³ Katja Kessin, artist statement, *Still Alive*s exhibit, Ammersbek, Germany, 1995.

directly approach the subject matter, even in anti-fascist works of art. From the onset I had painted *Still Alive*s for their exhibition in Germany, in this case in the city hall of the town where I grew up, Ammersbek near Hamburg:

*Still Alive*s are paintings of little objects, all the things left in my mother's house after she died. I took a lot of them and turned them into family portraits, which I created out of objects. They are (portraits of) people, but they don't look like it, as they are tabletops with objects on them. They were (paintings) about the Third Reich, and the Second World War, or at least they were about the remnants of that era: the damage that people had done, and also the damage done to people. Because of that, the paintings needed the symbols that went along with the era. I did not want this to be totally obscure. It was also a test. I was really upset when I was over there (in Germany), and my brother-in-law told me: "You can't have a swastika on a work!" This does not make sense. Why would you want to talk about something, if in fact you are not allowed to "talk" about it? How will you reach people, if you can't tell them that a rake is a rake? I wanted to be the devil's advocate.

*Still Alive*s was accompanied by a storybook, which contained a short story on each of the works, in order to get the meaning across that I intended for these pieces. The storybook was free for the audience and available in German, English, and French on the various occasions the series was on exhibit. In order to defuse the sinister aspects of the paintings somewhat and make them approachable for the audience, I introduced a certain amount of humour in some of the pieces:

I find it is absolutely necessary to use a lot of humour in these paintings, because not only do they otherwise become overwhelming for me, but they also become overwhelming for anyone to look at, and the point is defeated. We already know all about the major wars that have taken place in the last few hundred years. We probably have more knowledge than anyone ever had before about the violence that is going on. Yet, the more we are aware of it, the more we have to shut it out and be selective about what we let in, to protect ourselves. In a way these paintings attempt to stop people in their step for just a second, to think about something that has already been filed away.

I won't eat my soup (fig. 5.9) from 1994 is one of the works in *Still Alive*s that employs humour in order not to alienate the audience. The painting is a tabletop set for a family of four. The tablecloth features embroidered swastikas – except they are not really swastikas, as I added an extra hook to the end of their basic cross

shape. In the middle of the table there is a large soup tureen with a ladle. The soup is swastika – or blood-red. The four white napkins, folded into triangles, are displayed in reminiscence of a swastika. The images on the napkins tell a story from *Struwwelpeter* entitled “Suppenkaspar,” Soup Kaspar. In the story a chubby little boy won’t eat his dinner at the supper table. His parents caution him to obey, but he refuses. Kaspar refuses to eat until he is so thin that he dies. In the last image of the story, we see Kaspar’s grave, decorated with a tureen of soup. In *I won’t eat my soup*, which is Kaspar’s refrain in Heinrich Hoffmann’s poem *Der Suppenkaspar*, I chose four pictures from the original story. I retold the story in the painting by copying the images onto the four triangular napkins. Instead of signing the painting with my name, I copied Kaspar’s little grave in the corner of the piece and signed my initials on the cross. Once again this is a work that combines a personal narrative with a larger political context in conjunction with the subject of Nazi Germany:

I put my initials on it because to me this was a symbol for the subtle defiance people used in the Third Reich, in order to retain some kind of authority and agency. The particular story that goes with this painting is about my grandmother, who was supposed to change her Polish-sounding last name to a German name: seeing that she was a German lady, she should behave like one. She was a very stubborn woman and did not go along with this, and yet absolutely nothing happened to her. Somewhere else, the same story could have turned into something totally different. These little acts that retained a personal agency had a larger political meaning.

In her refusal to change her name, my grandmother had risked a fate much like Soup Kaspar in Heinrich Hoffmann’s book *Struwwelpeter*. In a way, she “refused to eat her soup.” In Nazi Germany it often took less defiance to endanger one’s life. More often than not, those refusing higher authority ended up dead. The subtle humour of the painting, the employment of childhood imagery, and the little storybook that accompanies the paintings in *Still Alive*, all aid in making the subject matter of the Third Reich approachable to the audience. This was particularly important in the case of a predominantly German audience, which I expected to be reluctant to face the legacy of the Third Reich.

Another painting in *Still Alive*s is *Letters from the Front* from 1995 (fig. 5.10). The painting features a giant swastika that was created by the negative spaces stemming from an arrangement of pieces of paper on a table top. They are replicas of my mother's drawings that she made as a teenager in the Third Reich. They depict images that were considered normal in Nazi Germany. The centre of the painting consists of an old tray. Around the tray a variety of items is on display. They belonged to my uncles who died young as a result of the Third Reich. The objects are all that exists from which to reconstruct their identities. The tray is covered by oak leaves, a metaphor for Nazi Germany, and for those who have "fallen." The German title of *Letters from the Front* is *Eichenblätter, Leichenfledder*, which translates into "Oak Leaves, Desecrated Corpses." A humorous aspect of this work is that I intended to deny the existence of the swastika in case of censorship, blaming it on the censor's subconscious.

As much as the hidden swastikas are key elements in *Still Alive*s, the most important items are the factual remnants from the era they portray. In *Letters from the Front* one of these artifacts is a small, hollow cork containing six miniature dice; it has the words *Drogerie Schwarz, Elbing* written on it – Schwarz pharmacy – a German-Jewish pharmacy in the former German city of Elbing. This object illuminates an aspect of German history that has altogether disappeared. The Baltic German Jews were killed or dispersed, and the city of Elbing was destroyed by the Russian army in 1945. After the war, Elbing became part of Poland. The original German citizens were forced to leave, and Elbing was rebuilt as Elbląg – a different name for a different people. The hollow cork in *Letters from the Front* is a metaphor for both the city and its people. Because they have disappeared, the cork is the only proof that remains of their existence. The painting depicts the objects with factual accuracy, in order to avoid the trap of falling into nostalgia. In *Letters from the Front*, some viewers actually spot the giant swastika in the negative spaces of the work,

while others don't. What was important to me, though, is the fact that as figure or ground, subliminally it is visible to all, very much like the subject matter of the Third Reich in Germany during my childhood.

The most complex work in this series is the painting *Inheritance – and I decided to become an artist* from 1995 (fig. 5.11). The title is based on Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, in which he refers to the moment when he decided to become a politician. *Inheritance* is a fake table, a canvas installed on wooden legs. Like the other *Still Alive*s, it is an acrylic on canvas, measuring 3.3 by 2.4 feet. Installed on legs, the table stands approximately 2.5 feet tall. The legs are painted brown to match the colour of the canvas, or tabletop. On the tabletop I copied two of my mother's drawings and two of Leo Haas's drawings in great detail. They are in a similar arrangement to the four drawings in *Letters from the Front*, but displayed in slight disarray. The drawings appear to have been pushed together so that they overlap. Because of the overlap there is no swastika visible in the negative spaces between the drawings. The four drawings depict everyday scenes experienced by Third Reich Germans and everyday scenes experienced by Third Reich German Jews in concentration camps:

This is a replica of my mother's works, showing a guy with a swastika on his uniform collecting money for the poor, so it reverses the idea of what a good guy and what a bad guy was in the Third Reich. Another drawing is a replica of one of my uncle's works that shows him in a concentration camp. Here is another drawing by my uncle, showing the dead as they are hauled off in the camp. Another one is showing my mother as a fifteen year old, with her dad who was too old to be a soldier, but who was drafted to be a street policeman.

Interspersed between the four large drawings are my own early childhood drawings, self-portraits that I drew between the ages of two and five, the age by which I had decided to become an artist. They visually provide a subtle link between the two contrasting sets of Third Reich drawings, making clear to the viewer that the scenes took place at the same time, in the same country. This seems nearly unimaginable today. The piece invites the viewer to reflect upon the fact.

Once again the work is an expression of my need for political and personal approaches in dealing with the legacy of the Third Reich. The object quality of *Inheritance* added to the level of involvement by the audience, as it appears to be an actual table with actual drawings displayed on it. It is frustrating for the viewer that the two starkly contrasting sets of drawings overlap. In viewing the piece, one actually feels the need to separate out the concentration camp scenes. This is a frustration that I intended the audience to experience.

As I had expected from the very beginning, these works were stopped at the German border. It took the interference of the exhibiting venue, the city hall of my hometown of Ammersbek, in order to negotiate their release. I had initially been informed that I would be summoned to court, as I had attempted to bring into Germany paintings that depicted fascist imagery. Apparently the border guards had the simple instruction to intercept any material with Third Reich imagery, rather than determining whether they were of fascist or anti-fascist nature.

The trouble I experienced at the German border sparked a response piece, the painting installation called *Bad Girl* from 1996, the year after the German exhibit of *Still Alive*. *Bad Girl* consists of an old wooden school desk (fig. 5.12). The desk measures 26 by 22 inches and stands two and a half feet tall. Onto the desk I painted a slightly altered replica of a photo depicting me as a five year old. On the photo I am drawing a stick figure on a school blackboard with a piece of chalk. In the installation of *Bad Girl*, the original photo hangs on the wall above the desk. I copied the original photo onto the desktop with acrylic paint and slightly changed it. The altered version shows me as a five year old, drawing a swastika onto the blackboard. On the desk the audience finds a stack of pages with the following story:

Bad Girl

All children knew that there could be no greater crime than the drawing of a swastika. A verbal threat was never made as the subject was taboo, and yet we were sure that such a deed would propel us straight from school into a reformatory (older people would, of course, go straight to jail). To this day, the display of a swastika is unconstitutional in Germany. This fact nearly had me arrested in 1996, when I brought my paintings to Germany for the first time.⁵⁴

The piece combines personal narrative with historical fact. The old school desk, which appears to be from the 1940s or 1950s, features countless marks made by children over the many years of its use. It is a Canadian school desk, a symbol for the education of children. In using the desk, I provided a link from my childhood to the childhood memories of the audience. Other marks on the table include acrylic paint splashes because I used this old desk as a painting table in my studio for many years. The paint splashes establish a link from the drawing child to the now-adult artist. They are proof that they are indeed the same person. Just like the storybooks in *Still Alive*, the printed story can be taken home by the audience and thereby infiltrate the audience's domestic space.

Bad Girl was a key piece in my evolution as an artist. It made me aware that, with regards to the Third Reich, I was no longer involved in an artistic practice only, but was steering towards a production that was becoming increasingly more theoretical and interdisciplinary. Thus in 1997 I informed myself of possibilities in which I could combine my visual and verbal theoretical investigations in order to research others who, like me, were involved in a second-generation German visual art practice. I found such a venue in Concordia University's interdisciplinary doctoral program in the Humanities, where I started my studies in 1998. The first body of work that I produced as a visual and theoretical investigation into

⁵⁴ Katja Kessin, *Bad Girl*, 1996.

second-generation German visual art was *The Grim Reaper*, which was completed between 1998 and 1999.

The Grim Reaper is a painting installation that investigates the subject of violence, in the family environment as well as in the context of genocide. My point of departure was a series of eleven of my original childhood drawings, four of which I had produced at the age of two, and seven of which I had drawn at the age of five. From the large collection of my early childhood drawings, I had chosen eleven drawings that seemed appealing and cute on first sight, but which on closer inspection appeared to have an underlying sinister meaning. I decided to copy the eleven drawings onto large canvasses of the same general proportions as the original drawings. I was hoping to discover the actual meaning of the pieces by using the painterly process as a time-travel device, reconnecting me to childhood.

The Grim Reaper combines two separate yet connected components. Each component is made up of eleven individual works. The main body consists of the eleven large-scale acrylic paintings on stretched canvas, measuring up to five by seven feet. The figures on the paintings are life-sized copies of the small figures on the drawings, painted freehand. Because they have been painted freehand there are minor differences between the compositions on the original drawings and those on the paintings. The large paintings are accompanied by eleven small pieces: laminated colour copies of my original childhood drawings, to which I added a simple textual element in Photoshop. The addition of the text in the companion pieces brings the original childhood drawings into a context that differs from their original meaning. I chose each text according to the underlying meaning of the original drawing, which revealed itself to me during the painting of the large canvasses. In viewing *The Grim Reaper*, the audience is exposed to a shock twice. The large replicas of the cute childhood drawings look menacing at a large scale, while the text on the small companion piece adds a frightening context. I do not

recall the events that originally caused me to draw the images nearly forty years ago, nor did I remember the kind of emotions that accompanied their execution. However, in carefully copying each line and mark onto the large canvasses, I experienced intense emotions, which in turn triggered the titles on the small companion pieces. The 1990s version of the drawings revealed a truth that differed greatly from the harmless originals, and seemed to indicate that subjects such as violence, war, death, and genocide are no strangers in a child's world, even if later on in adult life we may reinvent our childhood as having been a safe place.

In viewing the exhibition, which appears harmless on first sight, the audience slowly becomes aware of the fact that *The Grim Reaper* deals with grave subject matter. The size of the paintings dismantles our illusion of a safe distance and, by dwarfing the viewer, effectively reconnects us to childhood. The combination of gravity in the subject matter and black humour, image and text, adds a startling effect. What initially might have been misread as cute now leaves no doubt regarding its potential menace, informing us that childhood is indeed an extremely vulnerable state of being. Four works in particular address the series' connection to Germany's history of violence.

One of the works is *Endangered Species* (fig. 5.13). I drew the original childhood drawing in 1961, when I was nearly two years old:

The original drawing is the cover of my first book of drawings. It says *Katjas erstes Malheft* (Katja's first book of drawings), so I guess before that I never drew, or at least not officially into a book. My mother was a teacher – she liked things in books. I probably requested that my mother draw something for me, or she might have said: "What would you like to have on the cover?" I probably said "you and me," or "a mom and a baby." My mother must have gotten as far as drawing the head of the girl, which by the way looks like my sister and me. She drew most of the baby's carriage, with a doll inside. At that point I must have ripped the pen out of her hand and finished the baby carriage (and the girl). I started drawing very early, and I think I used drawing very knowingly as language. Because I was not a very talkative kid, I drew a lot.

Endangered Species measures seven by five feet. The painting features a girl pushing a carriage with a doll inside. The painting obviously represents a collaborative effort between an adult and a child. Visible around the two central figures, there is a variety of what first appears to be scribbles. Under close inspection, the scribbles start to look like specific objects:

I painstakingly recreated all of what, in the original, looks like scribbles. They look like absolute nothings. As I was enlarging them onto the painting, I had to draw out certain lines in order to make sense of what I was doing, and ignore other ones. Then the scribbles became all kinds of technological advances, like an airplane, but a very humanoid airplane. This is some kind of a car. I'm not totally sure what this is – in the small drawing it looks like nothing – but here it definitely has some sense to it, maybe some kind of bicycle or something with teeth.

By enlarging the original drawing, I created a threatening effect for the audience faced with a life-sized mother and child image. The figures are surrounded, attacked by what appears to be dangerous war machinery. On the large painting, the legs of the mother figure look like that of a war amputee. On the laminated companion piece, the text *Endangered Species* has been applied right across the childhood drawing, adding a further sinister potential to the meaning of the work.

Another work from *The Grim Reaper* is *Kristallnacht* (fig. 5.14), "Crystal Night." The large canvas measures six by four-and-a-half feet:

In the small drawing, a child is sitting up in bed. There is a mythical figure flying over it called *Sandmännchen*, or little sandman. I think that readers of Walter Benjamin might have run into him: he visits children at night, throws a bit of magic sand into their eyes and then they go to sleep. When you see the original drawing, you see a very cute image. But on the enlargement you see Sandman's very pointy teeth, a child startled awake, sitting frightened in his bed, and a creature (flying above) that is less happy and magical, but more violent and a kind of clown figure. What struck me in seeing the large painting is that there was not sand thrown, but some kind of glass shards: you see the sandman flying above with his bag that is normally full of sand, but in this case he leaves a trail of glass shards behind. I am not claiming that as a child I knew anything about *Kristallnacht*, but when I did the small companion piece to this painting, I chose that word.

As a five-year-old child, I illustrated the German fairy tale of the Sandman. As an adult I superimposed the word *Kristallnacht* on the laminated copy of the original drawing. (It is a reference to 19 November 1943, which is also known as the night of broken glass, or "Crystal Night." It was the first time the Nazis openly terrorized the German Jewish population.) In the act of copying the drawing onto a large canvas, this was the underlying meaning that revealed itself.

Another work from *The Grim Reaper* is *Auschwitz* (fig. 5.15), another illustration of a German fairy tale. The large painting measures six-and-a-half by five feet. The original childhood drawing depicts a stereotypical German leading his pig in a rural setting. The boy or man is smiling, and the pig looks happy. On the right of the image is a large house; the background is dotted with additional houses. In choosing the original drawing, I had been inspired by the fact that it depicted a stereotypical German in *Lederhosen* (which are traditional Bavarian leather pants). Because I grew up in Hamburg, far from Bavaria, *Lederhosen* was an outfit as exotic to me then as a grass skirt or a sari. Once I was an adult, it therefore seemed odd to me that I should have drawn it. I was intrigued to find out what meaning I would discover underneath this apparent illustration of a harmless story:

As I was replicating it, during the painting process, I became aware of these sinister-looking houses. They were no longer happy and light, as they appeared in the drawing. There was something going on in them that you could not really see in the original. All of the houses have this very heavy smoke pouring from them. And then I noticed how the window of the large house was barred with a big black cross, which stuck out in the large painting, more than in the original drawing. At the same time I was reading a lot of books about Jewish German history and could hardly believe that the painting was a connection to the stereotypical medieval imagery used in Europe, and especially in Germany, to describe Jews: the symbol used was a pig. At that point the meaning of the original drawing became apparent in its replication: the stereotypical German, leading what he created – the stereotyped Jew – to Auschwitz. Although at that point in history, neither of them knew where this was going to lead, that's how it turned out. The pig's tail is not a curly piggy tail, but rather looks like a violent object in the painting.

Copying the original image caused an intense revulsion in me. During the process of repainting the house with the black cross on its window, it started to look like a concentration camp. Suddenly all the other elements in the image seemed to relate to the theme of Auschwitz. In my interview with Loren Lerner, I explained that this is the most uncomfortable piece in the series for me. It made me feel ill to paint it, I feel sick when I look at it now, and I am not comfortable exhibiting it. However, once the underlying, sinister layer of meaning in the original drawing had revealed itself in the act of copying it on a large scale, I had no choice but to add the word *Auschwitz* in Photoshop to the small companion piece: "I might have called it something else, except I couldn't."

Rather than providing any one master narrative from which to construe a mythical Third Reich or Holocaust past, *The Grim Reaper* invites the audience's participation in a life-sized painting environment. The viewer is encouraged to use the series as a time machine with which to travel to the past, using art as their vehicle. The images in this series open up the discourse on violence to a discourse that lies outside of an exclusively German socialization. *The Grim Reaper* establishes links between the subtle forms of socially accepted forms of violence and genocide, without being didactic. The work opens up paths between the personal and the political, the past and the present, the artist and the audience.

Being a doctoral student in an interdisciplinary program enabled me to engage in a variety of investigations that combined narrative and theoretical, as well as visual and textual elements. One of these investigations was the series *A is for Auschwitz* from 1999. It consists of twenty-six archival black-and-white images, which I scanned and altered in Photoshop. The images measure 8.5 by 11 inches each, the size of standard writing paper. In altering these images, I changed their apparent meaning by adding a simple textual element. I integrated the text into the images, rather than giving it the function of a verbal explanation. The

result is a visual alphabet that appears to be designed for children, but actually deals with what we generally consider to be adult subject matter, such as racism, the Third Reich, the Holocaust, and nuclear war.

A is for Auschwitz allows for numerous interpretations, both in its sequencing and the strategic combination of image and text. Thus the letter *J* is represented by an image depicting a bishop giving the Nazi salute, captioned by *J is for Jesus* (fig. 5.16), rather than the obvious choice in a Holocaust alphabet, in which *J* might stand for Jew. Without being explicit, this work invites the audience to construct or re-examine their own alphabets of violence. It does not shy away from establishing links to genocide in general, as for example, in *N is for Nagasaki*, and it also points out the role that industrialization played in twentieth-century violence, as in *V is for Volkswagen*.

The work freely changes languages between German and English. It implies that, post-Auschwitz, the parameters for human understanding have changed. Where trauma and taboo render human beings speechless, images might take over. The alphabet provides an archival legacy of violence that belongs to all of us, whether we want to take responsibility or not. This reference to a greater global and cultural heritage is further enforced by the lack of proper identification for the archival sources of the images I used. Rather than being owned by a specific author, they illustrate a shared history owned by all.

Dancing on a Tightrope

Another important aspect in the evolution of my artistic practice is my frequent involvement with public performance. Performance is not something that comes natural to me – I am not comfortable being the centre of attention and am generally shy. However, working with painting as my main art practice occasionally made painting feel safe. In a sense, for an artist there is nothing more comfortable

than working in a medium in which you have technical expertise and in which the products will be admired for their technical accomplishment. I started to become involved in performance for two reasons: first, because I was dealing with risky subject matter, I wanted to experience risk in the construction of the piece itself. Second, whenever painting felt too safe, I wanted to frighten myself, so my art practice would feel like a dance on a precarious tightrope, as it had been when I started out as a visual artist. In performance you never know what might happen. In putting myself at risk and in becoming the piece of art myself rather than simply hanging some canvasses, I added an element that seemed appropriate to my investigations of the Third Reich legacy.

In my piece *fr/agile* (fig. 5.15), I combined the experience of pain with a symbol of hope and courage. I found an experienced tattoo artist with whom I collaborated in transferring a pair of small wings onto my back. The wings were of my own design. The tattoo was the point of departure for the piece, which I performed in the Bourget gallery in Montreal in August 2002, at the opening of my doctoral thesis exhibit, *Speechless*.

Upon entering the exhibit, the audience faced a white wall on which two standard-sized photos of the tattooed wings of my back had been mounted at shoulder height, about three metres apart from each other. A wooden bench was installed a few metres away from the wall. In front of the bench, between bench and wall, were three bowls containing paint. A large, red plastic bowl in between the bench and the wall was filled with red paint. Next to the large bowl were two small bowls. The small bowl on the right contained red paint, the one on the left, blue paint. In between the two wings, lined up against the wall, stood a pair of slip-on sandals.

At the beginning of the performance, I was sitting on the bench, barefoot and in a simple red dress that covered the tattoos on my back. In rising from the

bench, I stepped into the bowl of red paint. In kneeling down I simultaneously dipped my left hand into the bowl of blue paint, and my right hand into the bowl of red paint. I then stepped back out of the bowl and slowly started to walk towards the wall ahead of me. I lifted my hands so the paint wouldn't drip. In approaching the wall, I left a series of bright red footprints behind. When I reached the bare wall in between the photos of the wings, I wrote the letters *f* and *r* with the fingers of my blue left hand onto the wall, adding the word *agile* with my red right hand.

Together the letters made up the word *fragile*. I then pressed my hands on the wall to the left and right of the word, at the exact height of the wing photos, and then pressed my head on the wall above in a gesture of mourning. When I finally lifted my forehead and hands, the word *fragile* had become framed by a blue and a red handprint. With paint-stained hands, I uncovered my back to reveal the actual tattooed wings. For a brief moment, the audience saw three sets of wings aligned in a row: the photographed wings, the wings on my back, and the handprints, which were also reminiscent of wings. Thus the fragile human, through art, was momentarily empowered with six wings. I ended the performance by slipping on the sandals underneath the newly created image and walking off to the right, avoiding any additional footprints.

The performance illuminates the importance that art can have in our dealing with the residue of traumatic events, particularly in the aftermath of the Third Reich. In combining the words *fragile* and *agile* I wanted to speak about the general human condition after Auschwitz. We have become aware of the fragility of the state of humanity, and need to use our resources in order to work through the traumatic residue of the past. Although we are fragile, we are also agile, and therefore have personal agency to make real change, both in the world and in our lives. *Fr/agile*, with its multiple sets of wings, adds an element of courage and hope to a painful past. I used the wings as a general symbol for empowerment, and

particularly as a symbol for empowerment through art. For the remainder of the *Speechless* exhibition, the photographed wings, my handprints, and the painted word *fragile* remained on the wall. My red footsteps served as a reminder of the performance and an invitation to gallery visitors to walk in my footsteps. Or rather, if they can't literally walk in my footsteps, viewers can at least come close to where I have been. From early childhood, it would seem that I've been working out a complex legacy as a second-generation German artist, moving through levels of awareness as I work. Although I initially did not choose to work with the subject of Nazi Germany, it was something that became unavoidable once I realized that this was my major, underlying concern. As I stated in an interview with Alison Ramsey:

I never set out to do any works about the Holocaust; being a German artist the farthest thing would have been to go and appropriate the Holocaust. However, it seems to be that no matter what kind of art, bodies of artwork I work with, the Holocaust does come out at a certain point. Generally my artwork deals with violence, not a chosen subject. With regards to the Holocaust I feel [that,] rather than appropriating the Holocaust, the Holocaust has appropriated me.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Katja Kessin, interview with Alison Ramsey, "Katja Kessin Confronts the Deeply Uncomfortable," Concordia University *Thursday Report* (27 April 2000): 2.

CHAPTER 6

Bettina Hoffmann

Remnants from the Past

Bettina Hoffmann is the youngest of the artists I interviewed. She is a recent immigrant to Canada, and lives in Montreal with her partner and their daughter. I interviewed Bettina on 22 June and 12 July in 2001, at which time she had been a resident of Montreal for approximately one year. The interviews were conducted in German and Bettina corrected and verified the translated interviews against the German originals. I have also translated additional commentaries by Birgit Möckel from *Urbane Legenden*, a catalogue providing an overview of Bettina Hoffmann's work in Germany until 1995.

Bettina Hoffmann was born in the city of Regensburg in Germany in 1964. When she was five months old, her family moved to Berlin, for her father's work. Bettina grew up in Berlin-Spandau, which is not quite at the centre of the city. She has three siblings, two of whom are still alive. Her brother and sister are medical doctors and still live in Berlin. Bettina's mother is a doctor as well, and used to work as a pediatrician. Bettina's father also studied medicine, but as a graduate student he switched to psychology and became a psychiatrist.

Bettina's parents were born in Germany in 1935, her mother in Hestia, her father in the Rhineland. In 1945 Bettina's parents were only ten years old, but had seen their share of the war. Bettina does not know much about their childhood in World War II, only a few anecdotes told by her mother. Bettina's mother had an older brother who was killed at the age of fourteen, when his school was bombed while the city of Fulda was under siege. In 1945 the Americans occupied Hestia, taking over Bettina's mother's home, which forced the family to live crammed together in a small space. Bettina's mother also told the children stories about

atrocities committed by the Russians, although, in fact, the Russians had been quite far away from Hestia in 1945.

Unlike her mother, Bettina's father hardly ever talks about himself, and Bettina refrains from asking him questions. When Bettina was a child, there was a time when her father studied ancient Hebrew. He also occupied himself with studying religion and philosophy, but learning Hebrew was something he spent a lot of time doing, teaching himself to read and write. Close to where the family went on vacation, there was an old Jewish cemetery. Bettina's father would go there to participate in ceremonies, covering his head. Although she wondered why he did this, as a child Bettina never asked him. She would love to ask her father now, but does not have a close relationship with him, so she still does not bring it up. Bettina generally does not want to ask questions and wonders whether that might have to do with her being German.

Bettina's parents separated and have both remarried. Her mother's new husband tells more about war times in Germany than Bettina's parents do. He comes from the eastern part of Germany and fled the Russian invasion in 1945. He often tells how hard times were then. He also tends to stress how terribly he suffered, while bringing up the subject of *Wiedergutmachung* – money that Germany pays to the former slave workers of the Third Reich in order to make up for the deeds of Nazi Germany. Bettina's stepfather says that he should receive the same payments, as he is also a refugee, and his family lost all of their belongings.

When Bettina was growing up in (West) Berlin, the residue of the Second World War was still visible. She did not think of it as extraordinary – it was normal to her. Many of the houses in Berlin had grenade holes, and in large sectors of the city, where the rubble of bombed houses had been removed, there was only sand. To Bettina and her siblings, the sand piles were dunes, where the children played. Eventually commercial centres were built in Spandau, turning it into a giant

construction site. For the children that was another amazing playground paradise, great for riding their bikes and more. Today Berlin-Spandau is built up with huge shopping centres, but when Bettina was a child, ruins were considered normal. The Berlin of her childhood was very poor. All the houses looked shabby, roads were made of cobblestone instead of asphalt, and there were hardly any cars. Bettina saw nothing unusual with that.

During Bettina's childhood it was difficult to buy fresh vegetables or other luxuries in Berlin because the city was unable to get sufficient supplies through the Wall, which seemed a normal feature to Bettina. To her mind, all cities had walls, and in order to travel one had to pass border controls. At the time she never actually had the awareness of living in Germany. But when she made contact with West Germany, which Bettina thought of as the real Germany, Bettina found the place and people's lives there somehow less intense. When visiting relatives in the West, everything always seemed nicer, more idyllic, and more harmonious to her.

The border controls around Berlin were relentless. The transit route to Berlin led from West Germany through the East. Every time Bettina's family visited West Germany, they were searched by the East German border patrols, who looked under the car and checked the gas tank with a wire to find out whether it had been modified. When returning to West Berlin at night, all the children had to get out of the car, whether they were asleep or not, so the guards could check underneath the seats. The border guards' torturous routine had a great impact on the general image Bettina had of East Germany.

In the fifth or sixth grade, Bettina's class read a children's book, the story of a Jewish boy in Berlin. Although she does not quite remember the exact story, she remembers that the book touched upon things having to do with the Holocaust. In the eighth or ninth grade, when Bettina was about thirteen years old, the Holocaust became an actual subject in school, yet Bettina never felt that she was given new

information. She thinks that, from the very beginning, she must have had some kind of prior knowledge, although she doesn't know where it came from. During her last year of secondary school, the only history that seemed to matter was the Holocaust, which in some form was the constant subject. The children were also shown a lot of Holocaust images. That was a shock for Bettina and has imprinted itself over the image she has of her culture. It marked her so intensely that, during her travels to other countries, she always expected to be disliked because she was German.

Bettina was involved in art from childhood on, doing numerous art projects on her own and visiting exhibitions with her parents. In secondary school her two major fields were English and Art, and at the end of tenth grade Bettina clearly knew that she wanted to study Fine Arts. From 1985 to 1992 Bettina studied Fine Arts at the Art Academy of Berlin. Although Berlin had a reputation for being cool and interesting, the Art Academy was rather conservative and boring. In retrospect Bettina considers her later studies abroad to have been the most important part of her education. Fine Art students in Berlin worked with just one faculty member. Bettina decided to work in mixed-media with Shinkichi Tajiri, an American of Japanese descent. Because Tajiri did not speak any German, the class was conducted in English. At that time, English became a real means of communication for Bettina, rather than a mere second language. The class was quite an international mixture, which inspired students to look into studies outside of Germany.

While living in Berlin, Bettina often had times when she thought that she wanted to leave. In 1987 she felt an absolute need to leave Germany for the first time. She exchanged studios and apartments with a student from the Netherlands and went to study in Amsterdam for a semester. Amsterdam was the first city without a wall she experienced, and being able to leave the city on her bicycle was an amazing experience for her. After having lived outside of Germany, Bettina again

and again went through periods when she wanted to leave Berlin, needing change. She had started to regularly look for scholarships outside of Germany and once spent three months in Turkey, in the city of Istanbul. Her studies outside Germany taught her that it is good to not just travel, but to live somewhere else, as it gives you an entirely different connection to other cultures.

In 1989 Bettina had the opportunity to study abroad, as an exchange student in California, where she stayed for a year. During Bettina's year in California, which was near the end of her studies, her art practice underwent some distinct changes. At the California Institute of the Arts, most students worked within a socio-political framework, a practice that Bettina found interesting. While she was in California, the Berlin Wall came down. Bettina felt strange not being in Berlin, and having to hear about it in the news instead. In fact, she was convinced that the Wall could not possibly remain open, and that it would immediately be closed again. It simply seemed too inconceivable. Some of the German exchange students immediately returned to Germany. Although Bettina had applied and been accepted for another year of studies in California, first she wanted to see what was happening in Berlin.

After the fall of the Wall, Berlin turned out to be so exciting that Bettina ended up staying there. She started to spend a lot of time in the former East Berlin, which had been nearly inaccessible to West Berliners before. She noticed that the East reminded her of the West Berlin of her childhood. West Berlin had slowly changed over the years, until the remainders of the war disappeared, replaced by something else. But now with the Wall gone, those childhood images suddenly returned. East Berlin was still marked by the war, just like West Berlin was when Bettina had first moved there with her family.

Back in Germany, Bettina was joined by her partner – a Quebecois whom she had met in California. Their daughter was born in Berlin in 1996. The couple

lived together in Berlin for five years before deciding to move to Montreal. Bettina's partner never quite felt accepted in Germany. He had difficulties with the language as well as with the mentality of the people in general. Since he could not adjust to Berlin, it was clear that they would leave Germany at some point. Bettina found it interesting to move to Montreal, to learn about her partner's culture, and to familiarize their daughter with her Canadian background. Ultimately the two things came together: Bettina's constant desire to leave Germany on the one hand, and her partner's general discontent with Berlin on the other hand.

Living in Canada is still a relatively new situation for Bettina. She has yet to miss Berlin, which she finds quite strange. Although Bettina does not particularly miss the German language – she is comfortable communicating in both French and English – she misses the easy fluency of speaking in her mother tongue. In Berlin she thought that it was tough to be an artist, although she felt that she was slowly getting ahead and was acquiring a bit of fame. Being an artist in Berlin was difficult: she worked hard and had success, but she also went through a number of negative experiences. Moving to Canada felt like leaving all that behind, but the move brought with it a huge amount of stress. Bettina and her partner had planned for it well, but when all the packing and shipping and worries about cash flow became a reality, they were unsure how things would turn out. They left Germany without having a future carved out in Canada. It took them over a year to regain a sense of security, financially and otherwise.

When Bettina arrived in Canada, she decided she would apply for a Canadian passport as soon as possible, in three years time, but she informed herself ahead of time about the specifics of what to do, or not to do, in order to keep her German passport. For Bettina, giving up her German citizenship is out of the question, as it remains her point of origin. She wants to make sure that she can return to Germany, should things not work out for her in Canada. Although Bettina

knows other Canadian immigrants who wish to return to their home country, she considers their story to be entirely different from hers, as they have a completely different feeling towards their native country than Germans do. Sometimes Bettina feels that it is easier for Germans to emigrate: "Because they want to feel good, they can't put up with living in Germany."

In Germany Bettina always feels a connection to the Third Reich. For example, in the house where she used to live, she had the impression that the janitor had been a *Blockwart*, a Nazi informer, in the Third Reich, and that he certainly would have denounced Jews, as he was extremely authoritarian. Although Bettina has met similar people in Canada, she has such thoughts only in Germany. Bettina also experienced Berlin and its art world as extremely unsociable and hierarchical. Although this may be a less obvious Third Reich connection, she is quite affected by hierarchies in general. When someone is even slightly authoritative, Bettina feels immediately frightened. Although she is sure that this reaction comes partially from her upbringing (her father was very strict), it also complies with her general image of Germany as authoritarian and hierarchical.

In Bettina's Montreal neighbourhood, there are people from all over the world, whom she tends to view as individuals. But she does not have such a tolerant view in Germany, where she habitually ascribes everything negative to all Germans. For Bettina, being German is actually rather negative. When someone says to her: "you are so German" (as her partner sometimes does), she feels as though she's been treated harshly. Bettina thinks that those who say they're proud to be German actually have an uneasy feeling about their native background, which is precisely why they have to mention their background with pride.

Although Bettina calls herself a German artist, on applications for grants and exhibitions she never explicitly states that she is from Germany. She simply omits it, leaving it unclear where she is from. In Montreal she has the feeling that she's

different, in part due to the differences in her approach to art making. She generally finds the local art scene too “nice” and not provocative enough, in comparison with the kind of art that interests her. Over the years, Bettina has gone through different phases as an artist. She finds it much more interesting to be engaged in an art practice out on the street than in a gallery setting. To do art for art’s sake holds little interest for her – she wants to communicate something.

Living in Canada provides Bettina with a different view of herself. In Canada she sees herself more as a German artist, whereas in Berlin she saw herself as international. In Canada Bettina feels more German than in Germany, and wonders why there is a difference. She thinks that it’s because, in Canada, her responsibilities for Germany’s Nazi past have been removed from her somehow, which in turn permits her to speak about her concerns about Germany more freely.

Bettina started painting before she ever studied Fine Arts, practising her naturalistic drawing skills. She frequently makes use of her drawing skills in her exhibitions. Throughout her professional art education, Bettina explored a variety of techniques, styles, and media and eventually concentrated on working with installation. She often integrates sculptural objects in her installations, which she is able to build herself, because in the past she worked in the sculptural department of a film production company in Berlin. Today Bettina is mainly involved in photographic projects, for which she alters and processes her images digitally.

Since 2000 Bettina Hoffmann has been working and establishing herself as an artist in Montreal. The work that she produced over the last decade as a professional artist lends itself to the discussion here, particularly those works she produced prior to moving to Montreal. As I have not seen any of those works installed, my analysis is based on my discussion of the works with the artist, as well as the documentation provided by her.

Analysis of Works

Numerous works by Hoffmann touch upon the Second World War, the Third Reich, and the Holocaust. In order to provide the reader with an overview of Hoffmann's art practice in the context of second-generation German visual art, I will briefly highlight Hoffmann's installations that I consider to be the most relevant to my project, particularly her installations *Caught* from 1991, *The Emptied Dream* from 1991, *The Hidden Smiles* from 1994, as well as her sculptural piece, *Pedagogical Toy*, from 1993. However, I concentrate my analysis on Hoffmann's recurrent theme of showers, which featured prominently in three of her installations: *Showers*, *Acid Bath*, and *Public Showers*, which were executed and exhibited in Germany between 1992 and 1993. My process of analysis does not allow for an examination of Hoffmann's work in a strict chronological order, but instead provides the reader with a general sense of development of the artist's themes over a span of approximately five years.

From the very beginning of Hoffmann's practice as a professional artist, her main interests were centred on the theme of restrictions and limitations, sometimes branching into socio-political issues. She often takes inspiration for her projects from pre-existing imagery, such as images she finds in the research she undertakes for her projects. Thus, in some of her early pieces, Hoffmann appropriated blueprints of jails from a variety of sources, which she utilizes to represent her larger theme of restrictions and limitations. Although in her installations she generally works with situations that she has not personally experienced, they are nonetheless connected to her experience of growing up in post-war Berlin and metaphorically they stand in for being imprisoned or unfree.

Caught

In her installations in Germany, Hoffmann frequently worked with projections, integrating texts and actual images from books as well as photographs into her pieces. In *Caught* (from 1991), blueprints of jails served as Hoffmann's initial source of inspiration (fig. 6.1). For this particular piece, Hoffmann built a three-dimensional, octagon-shaped sculptural object that occupies the centre of the room in the installation. A detailed blueprint of a classical jail in the form of a cross, with a watchtower in its centre, has been drawn in pencil on the top of the uniformly grey octagon. Cables lead from the sculptural centrepiece to a series of four projectors, which are symmetrically aligned along the four walls of the room, facing away from the wall and therefore projecting words onto the opposite walls. The four German words Hoffmann has chosen for her projection – *gesehen*, *gerichtet*, *verloren*, *entzogen* – all pertain to the judicial system, and may roughly be translated into seen, judged, lost, and robbed:

In my early installations I worked from actual images, whatever I stumbled across. I looked at a lot of books, anything at all. I rephotographed and projected them: blueprints of jails, with words that carry more than one meaning. The title is *Caught*. You can see the jail's blueprint, that typical, classical jail in the form of a cross, with a watchtower in its centre. The blueprint has been drawn onto a crate with pencil and is labelled in French. From the crate, which has an octagonal shape, cables lead to the projectors. They project words that can be read in the active as well in their passive sense: I have seen, I have judged – just these words: seen, judged, lost, and robbed. They all have to do with the judicial system, judged but also helped up (*gerichtet/aufgerichtet*), but usually judged and directed.

As the German words may be read as either subjects or objects, Hoffmann is able to make her audience contemplate the judicial system from two opposing points of view: the point of view of the judge and the one who is on trial. In moving around the installation, the audience cannot avoid having the words projected onto their bodies. Thus the viewer finds herself caught, in the position of both surveyor and surveyed, judge and being judged, losing and being lost, restricting freedom

and being jailed. In *Caught* Hoffmann has successfully blurred the boundaries between justice and crime, right and wrong, forcing the audience to contemplate more complex solutions than are provided to us by the judicial system.

The Emptied Dream

In her 1991 installation, *The Emptied Dream*, Hoffmann employs the image of the dormitory to refer to the loss of freedom (fig. 6.2). In *The Emptied Dream* Hoffmann takes a further step in the development of her idea, coupling the loss of freedom with the loss of hope and the loss of future. It is important to note that Bettina's original German titles are generally smart, humorous, and often poetic wordplays that tend to carry more than one possible meaning. This is definitely the case in *The Emptied Dream*. Although Hoffmann's original German titles provide the viewer with important clues regarding the various possible meanings of her pieces, I am able to only approximate their meanings with a literal English translation. *The Emptied Dream* carries the German title *Der ausgeräumte Traum*.

Another work is *Der ausgeräumte Traum*. It is not "*Der ausgeträumte Traum*," although people tend to spell it that way.⁵⁶ The emptied dream – as if you are dreaming, and suddenly everything is taken away – something like that. A dream in itself has a positive connotation: it's not a nightmare, although it could be about something negative as well. Here it has been emptied – no illusions remain, no hopes.

In conjunction with her interest in prison blueprints, Hoffmann became interested in the image of the dormitory, as a site where something as private as the act of sleeping takes place in a public space, which causes an interesting friction between what we consider to be the private and the public sectors of our lives.

⁵⁶ The difference in spelling that Hoffman describes here denotes the difference between her own translation of the work's title – "the emptied dream" – and what people tend to read instead – "the finished dream."

Hoffmann's recurrent preoccupation with jails and dormitories illuminates a subtheme that tends to surface in one way or another in most of her work, that is, childhood. What Hoffmann finds intriguing about the subject of childhood is the stark contrast between fiction and reality. We are generally prone to believe that childhood is the best time of our life, whereas for many it is actually the most traumatic time of their lives.

For the installation of *The Emptied Dream*, Hoffmann has appropriated another blueprint of a jail, this time a plan of a jail for young offenders, in order to establish a connection to her interest in childhood. This time the blueprint is projected onto the ceiling of the room. Underneath the blueprint's projection, Hoffmann has lined up a series of four small beds, reminiscent of children's cots and covered in a rudimentary version of stark white sheeting. On first sight the beds are small enough to look like actual children's beds. However, a closer look confirms that they are indeed sculptural elements made by the artist, and in fact a small version of adult beds. Although the beds might fit a child, they do not actually resemble children's cots – the artist has used an uncomfortable scale, somewhere between toy-sized and actually bed-sized. The four beds have been lined up in a perfect row at equal distances underneath the only window of the room.

The installation features two additional elements. The first is a series of children's photographs, depicting images of a worry-free childhood. Some of them are projected onto the beds, while others are visible on the floor of the exhibition site. The second element is a text on one of the room's walls, which Hoffmann has appropriated from a fairy tale:

I added the text from a fairy story as another contrast – it's very pathetic, also quite old: a hundred years old. In the story a child flies up to the sky with an angel and looks down to earth, seeing only killing and murder, quite terrible. The future I reduced to light alone, in the sense that we cannot imagine our future. We see nothing, which is positive on one hand but also renders it unimaginable. The

piece also provides us with a look at recent history. What happened? What is the basis for my hopes, for my idea of what the future may bring? What I actually see when I have a good look outside does not give me much reason to believe that the future will be much better.

Overall very little light falls into the room, so the projections are clearly decipherable to the viewer. The viewer experiences the cognitive dissonance between the images of childhood ease and the text's accounts of a heavenly child's view of the world's suffering. With such dissonance, especially in the context of second-generation German visual art, this piece may be read as an illumination of the world we find ourselves living in after the destruction of what could be called our childhood dream: the end of our beliefs in modern progress after Auschwitz. The piece can also be read as the artist's effort to provide her audience with a glimpse of the causes that have contributed to the destruction of that dream. That is, in this case, "mistreated" children (in dormitories and juvenile detention centres) are not going to provide us with a dreamed-of better future because they will likely turn into victimizers themselves (as illustrated in the Third Reich).

The Hidden Smiles

The Hidden Smiles – Das Verschwiegene lächelt – is the title of an installation from 1994 (fig. 6.3). Once again the German title involves word play. It refers to something hidden or unspoken that suddenly breaks through in someone's smile. The piece was shown as part of a group exhibition in the city of Dresden, where Hoffmann was an invited artist. The exhibition site, Festspielhaus Hellerau, included shacks. Artists had been invited to pick a room in which to install their piece, so Hoffmann chose a tiled shower room that was relatively empty, except for an old sink. She changed the room very subtly by installing a photo at the average height where one would expect to be encountering a bathroom mirror above the sink. The photo's size approximates that of a standard bathroom mirror. It displays a series of four mannequin heads, which Hoffmann had collected over time.

The photographed heads, which appear to be children – Hoffmann refers to them as boys – are wearing identical pink bathing caps. Three of the heads appear to be the same size, whereas the fourth, the second head from the right, seems slightly smaller. Lined up along the bottom of the photograph, they form a slight semi-circle. This creates the illusion that the three identically sized heads are looking at the fourth. As it is smaller, the fourth head also appears to be the youngest of the mannequins. It is the only mannequin whose bathing cap is pulled down, covering the eyes.

The photo's background functions like an illusionary mirror, and upon viewing the installation, one momentarily perceives that the mannequins are actually interacting in front of a real mirror in the exhibition site, their reflections visible to the audience. That is, until we notice that the necks of all four heads are literally cut off at the bottom of the photograph: they are floating in space, unattached to bodies, yet they are smiling. Although the heads are bodiless, one can still imagine that there are bodies underneath.

Because the image is installed like a mirror in a bathroom, the installation implicates the viewer immediately, like a bystander in an ambiguous situation. According to Hoffman, the smallest mannequin might actually be receiving abuse from the others. We are left unsure, because all four figures are smiling, but since the head with the pulled-down cap is smaller, one can't avoid the possibility that we are indeed encountering an uncomfortable shift in power. The installation takes place in the private setting of a bathroom. In the case of a public bath, it's a secluded kind of space that may be the perfect setting for children to abuse others. Although fully aware that we are looking at a photograph, we are nevertheless made witness to a potentially violent act, and consequently are required to ask ourselves whether we should interfere or continue to watch.

The photo sets up a situation with a victim, a perpetrator, and a bystander. The smallest head, with its pulled-down bathing cap, may be smiling, but this is clearly in the role of the victim, while the other three heads, which appear to be accomplices in an unkind deed, take on the role of the perpetrators. Thus Hoffmann has successfully directed her audience into the role of witness and bystander. Although we may wish to interfere in the realistic-looking scene, our hands are actually bound – we are, after all, merely looking at a photograph.

Hoffmann's piece specifically refers to the fact that an upsurge of the radical right has appeared once again on a larger scale, not only in Germany but in the form of a universal problem. While Hoffmann lived in Germany, she often had the impression that the problem of right-wing radicalism was not looked at properly, and that it was often pushed aside, in favour of other problems having to do with the difficulties that Germany was experiencing with the reunification of the East and the West. As a result, problems involving right-wing radicalism in general and the rise of neo-Nazi organizations appeared to become secondary:

They are all laughing, or smiling, but this happens very quietly and they don't say a thing. For me the title *The Hidden Smiles* means that there is something that is not talked about, and we simply smile in response, playing along although this is not a nice game. It can be understood in the way that you simply watch as a bystander and don't interfere in this situation, in which the weakest of the group is being mistreated. Or it could be that you want to hide some part of the story, or even history, let's say that of Germany. You don't want to talk about it, but the hidden can still break through in that smile, it remains, is present. A smile is usually seen as something positive, but it could also be this kind of smile: you repress a problem, yet at some point it smiles at you, and thus breaks through again. By that point, it will have grown into a really big problem.

Hoffmann uses the pink bathing caps, which appear skin-like, as an allusion to skinheads, a contemporary version of right-wing radicals. The fact that the heads are severed clearly suggests the potential of violence in the situation we encounter. The fact that we, the audience, are standing where the mannequins would be standing if this were indeed their reflection, forces us to take on their roles,

contemplating both the perpetrators' and the victim's situation. In Hoffmann's *The Hidden Smiles*, what cannot be talked about, the hidden itself, becomes expressed in an uncomfortable smile. Once again she has succeeded in implicating the audience in her piece, forcing us to think outside of simple, binary systems such as victims, perpetrators, and bystanders.

Pedagogical Toy – Pädagogisches Spielzeug – is a small-scale model of a house that Hoffmann made from plywood in 1992-93 (fig 6.4). It was on exhibit in several group exhibitions. The house measures approximately 38 x 26 x 36 cm. It features a tinted roof and painted windows and a painted door. While Hoffmann has painted the roof red, a typical colour for the roof of a German house, she has painted the door and windows grey, adding white window frames. The title of the piece refers to the kind of toys that are actually called pedagogical toys in Germany, since they are supposed to have inherent qualities that may benefit children's early education. So-called pedagogical toys are usually made of wood or other natural materials. The walls of the house have been left in their natural beige plywood colour, in reference to these toys.

In *Pedagogical Toy*, as she did in *The Emptied Dream*, Hoffmann once again utilizes the discomfiting size of a model which is larger than a toy but smaller than the actual thing. Although this appears to be a toy house, it is clearly the model of an actual house. Hoffmann first built the house and then set it on fire. It features two burnt-out windows in the front, and an attic window that is burnt out as well. One of the house's side walls has obviously suffered a lot of fire damage:

In 1992-93, there were much too many house fires in Germany, in refugee asylums and in the houses of foreign families. There was one case, for example, that was the direct source of inspiration for this piece. There was a family, a Turkish family in I don't know where any longer, in West Germany, where some young people (young offenders were involved) started fires in a refugee house. That made you think, why would young people want to set a house on fire? Which ideology do they subscribe to that makes them want to hurt foreigners? That's why I called the house *Pedagogical Toy*. Which pedagogy supports

the action, and what has it taught these children, or what has been transferred onto them from their parents?

After building the house and painting it, Hoffmann had to figure out how best to burn it. She considers this to have been a perverse contemplation. For the purpose of setting the house on fire, she strategically cut four holes into it with a saw, one into the roof, one on the side, and two in the front of the house. She then made a small fire, using sticks and other adequate materials, and placed the house on top of the blaze. It caught fire very quickly so Hoffmann had to extinguish it immediately. Altogether the fire lasted only a few seconds. Hoffmann ended up with her final object and the feeling that the entire process had been really strange: for an instant she had slipped into the role of an actual perpetrator. During the burning process she also attempted to take photos. But because she had hardly any time at all, the photographs did not meet her expectations and she didn't end up using them in the installation of the final object:

I thought, the house alone, that's enough. The house is there, and the fire is present even though you don't see it. The piece is about the remains of German deeds, which you still see in these instances. Such a burnt-out house is always something terrible. I immediately think, who lived there, and who has lost everything?

As disturbing as the final piece may be for the viewer, to Hoffmann the thought processes triggered in her by having to contemplate burning the house and carrying out the deed are of equal importance to the final object. She was forced to identify with what might be going through a perpetrator's mind who is about to burn down a refugee asylum: "Yes, the culprits do that, they contemplate about what best to throw into the house in order to set a fire."

Hoffmann is not the only one to take on the role of the perpetrator in the case of *Pedagogical Toy*. Through the contemplation of Hoffman's object, the viewer is encouraged to contemplate that aspect of the artist's process as well, thus getting implicated in the role of the perpetrator. At best Hoffman allows us to take on the

role of the helpless witness and bystander. As Birgit Möckel in *Urbane Legenden* comments on both *The Emptied Dream* and *Pedagogical Toy*:

Out of focus, faded and far away as memories of things long ago, appear the photos of children's dreams, which keep reappearing in installations such as "the emptied dream." Amidst cement and rows of beds beneath the projected blueprint of a juvenile detention centre, they represent opposite worlds, co-existing in a world without warmth or human closeness, a world imprinted by losses and being lost. The actual results of such social surroundings – xenophobia and hatred of the other – the artist's "Pedagogical Toy" cynically comments on all of these.⁵⁷

Pedagogical Toy is a work that links child's play to grave matters. It illuminates the dark side of Germany's modern history, while clearly presenting it in the context of contemporary deeds – which, however, may be linked to the remnants of the past. With her *Pedagogical Toy* Hoffmann invites her audience to play along in a terrible game, making us the participants in a crime, in a gallery setting that suddenly becomes an unsafe environment.

Showers

The most important motif in Bettina Hoffmann's work as a second-generation German visual artist, prior to her immigration to Canada, is her recurrent use of showers. Between 1992 and 1993, Hoffmann worked with this theme on three occasions: first in the group exhibit *Relatively Intact* in 1992, the second time in her installation called *Acid Bath* in 1992, and the third time when her installation entitled *Public Showers* was exhibited in 1993 along with the installations of a number of other artists. Birgit Möckel, a German critic, draws attention to Hoffman's interest in empty rooms whose "former inhabitants have left

⁵⁷ Birgit Möckel, *Urbane Legenden – Berlin; Bettina Hoffman* (Bonn: Jochen Poetter, VG Bild-Kunst, 1995), no pages.

their mark.”⁵⁸ Although Hoffman wasn’t always conscious of the tragic “former inhabitants” of public showers, they left their mark in her work.

The first time Hoffmann merely stumbled across the theme of showers, which suggests a subconscious approach to the context of Nazi Germany, rather than approaching it consciously and intentionally. The second and third time Hoffmann consciously and knowingly approached the subject of showers in the context of the Third Reich. But she is still none too comfortable with the way that the showers keep appearing like a thread throughout her visual art practice:

In the shower period I borrowed a lot of the symbolism from bathrooms, perhaps because of the nudity, fragility. Some things ventured more towards experiences by women, others had to do with a more general sense of harm. Actually, I don’t find it peculiar at all, that this blend of fragility and danger or harm should meet in the realm of the bathroom.

Bettina Hoffmann first worked with showers in 1992, when she created an installation piece for the group exhibition, *Relatively Intact*. The exhibition took place in an old house. Hoffmann installed three beautiful, non-functional chrome showers in the bathroom of the old house, which was very dirty and run down. In order to create an uncomfortable atmosphere, Bettina made use of the stark contrast between the brand-new showers and their run-down environment. She further added a couple of towels to her installation and spilled some water on and around the shower floor, to make it appear as if they had recently been in use.

With more than one showerhead installed in a space, an allusion was made to a public bath. At the time Hoffmann was exploring the fact that public showers involve a strange tension between the private act and public space. They leave us vulnerable to the potentially harmful intentions of others who frequent the same public, yet strangely private place. As Hoffmann was working on her piece in the bathroom, she realized that it looked an awful lot like an image from a

⁵⁸ Möckel, *Urbane Legenden*, n.p.

concentration camp gas chamber in the Third Reich. Although visually her piece was actually far from looking like a gas chamber, the general ambiance was very close.

Once Hoffmann saw the final piece, the connection to gas chambers became very conscious to her. She had to face the fact that the issue of gas chambers was an underlying concern for her. This realization encouraged her to continue working with the theme, despite the fact that her shower pieces made her very uncomfortable: "Emotionally they really involve me – even me." It is important to stress that Hoffmann's allusion to gas chambers was at first unintentional. She made that connection only once the showers had already been installed: "I found that interesting, the fact that in Germany you merely have to install three showers along a wall, in a room that provides an old, rotted atmosphere, and presto, you have that association. I utilized that, as a subtheme."

Originally, in her contribution to the *Relatively Intact* group exhibit, Hoffmann's actual subject had not been the gas chambers. She merely had the intention to create a terribly uncomfortable atmosphere. Coincidentally, at the same time there was a major discussion going on in Germany about whether it was possible "to be German once again," because Germany was no longer divided. The discussion was carried out in the midst of a renewed rise of right-wing radicalism, neo-Nazis, and xenophobia: Germany had been very marked by the fact that there had been an East and a West Germany, further divided into a socialist and a capitalist system: "All that was present, and the past was a different story, it was so far away. I found that quite interesting, the fact that I had alluded to that situation with my shower installation, although I also found it strange to be using them this way."

Although Hoffman claims that she's uncomfortable making Nazi gas chambers her subject, she nonetheless made two other pieces on the theme after that first, unintentional, encounter with concentration camp gas chambers:

I created two shower installations. In one of them the room reminded me not quite so much of a concentration camp, but in another I actually planned that effect. I still included aspects in which I addressed the subject that had been there all along, the subject of interpersonal frictions. For me the roots are similar. You are able to keep a system going, once you have put into place that hierarchy, in which one can oppress the other – where there is a group that can feel strong and will walk all over the weaker ones.

Hoffman has created an experience of profound discomfort by making the viewer an active participant in this hierarchy of power relations.

Acid Bath

Acid Bath from 1992 is Hoffmann's second installation on the theme of showers, and her first conscious effort to work with the theme in the context of the Holocaust. The work was installed in an old house in Berlin that was being used for other art installations as well. Once again Hoffmann had a room at her disposal. She chose one that already featured four sinks and a toilet (fig. 6.5). The walls of Hoffmann's room had a visible division of colours into two sections, turquoise on the bottom and pink on top. The pink was somewhat reminiscent of Caucasian skin colour (or at least, the way it's represented in popular culture), and the turquoise alluded to the colour of a public pool. Hoffmann added three non-functional showers to the space. Thus the room became a communal space with four sinks, three showers, and a toilet. Once again Hoffmann spilled water onto the floor to make it appear as if the showers were in use, but this time she added a macabre element by placing shards of glass on the floor. This drew attention to the fact that this shower had an inherently dangerous potential:

What was very interesting for me with regards to the public showers is the fact that although you are in the shower and naked, you are in public as well. When you get undressed, you are there to clean

yourself. This could be a very pleasant experience, but in an institutionalized public shower, it becomes something very practical, clinical even. In my last installations I integrated a few macabre components as well, which are difficult to see on the documentation. Glass for example, you don't exactly want to step into it with bare feet, and also a bit of water spilt on the floor, so you could think that the showers are actually in use.

Hoffmann filled the four sinks that were part of the original room with water. Into all of them she placed items that carry specific meanings when read in the context of Nazi Germany. The first sink featured a silicone glove, connecting it to an invasive medical or search procedure. The second sink contained a wallet, an item that carries personal belongings, especially identification. This particular wallet held a credit card, a watch, and a photograph. The third sink featured several photos of hands, which appear to either be scratching or washing each other. The fourth sink held the photo of a child being forced to learn how to swim. The child's expression is quite unhappy. She attempts to swim in the water while being held with a pole by an adult who stands on the side of the pool. Only the legs of the adult are visible to the viewer. They appear to be quite sturdy:

For me that image stands for this installation, once again connected to childhood experience: that you are being forced to do something that you don't want to do at all, but don't have the power to refuse. That's what I pursued.

The title *Acid Bath* also connects the installation to Hoffmann's subject of photography, a subject which in itself is intricately linked to the importance that photographic documentation had in Nazi Germany, particularly in concentration camps, where each inmate was photographed upon arrival. Once again Hoffmann is playing with the multiple possible readings of her installation.

So whether it's personal objects or photographs, we are confronted with what Birgit Möckel calls preserved memories or "visualized feelings, exposed to the corrosive effects of the aggressive 'acid bath' we call past and present." Although the viewer doesn't experience violence literally, according to Möckel, we are still "rendered defenceless in the atmosphere of these spaces: we are under the attack of

our own sensitivity; the feelings that have been triggered go under our skin, make us accomplices and never let go again."⁵⁹

Public Showers

In 1993 Hoffmann's installation called *Public Showers* was shown in Berlin-Potsdam, in an industrial building that was about to be converted into an official exhibition venue (fig. 6.6). This was the first exhibit to take place there. Nearly everything in the building had been left in its original condition, which featured wooden beams that functioned subtly as a kind of separation of the large space. The exhibit showed installations by several artists simultaneously. The third and last time Hoffmann worked with the subject of showers, she was acutely aware of their connection to the Third Reich and the gas chambers: "I actually researched this by finding out exactly what they looked like, and that was a job – very unpleasant. I could have cried non-stop that this actually happened."

For the purpose of her installation, Hoffmann collected eight relatively plain showerheads. She bought plumbing supplies and installed the eight showers in a row in the open room. She also had a water drain put into the ground. It ended up looking as if these showers had actually been installed for some obscure reason in this particular space. In a corner of the room there was already a faucet, which added to the illusion that this was in fact a public shower. Although the space that Hoffmann chose for the installation of *Public Showers* was not clearly separated from the rest of the exhibition space, the intended association to concentration camp gas chambers was apparent:

There were many installations in that room, so you entered and expected to be seeing art. But I now know the reactions of some people, who mentioned to me that they immediately felt extremely uncomfortable in that space, even though (because of the other

⁵⁹ Möckel, *Urbane Legenden*, n.p.

installations) the context was clearly related to art, the effect remained. I was afraid that it would be drowned out, because it wasn't clearly separated, and because it was so unbelievable that these showers could have really existed here; but still it was enough to make you think: What is that? That appears to be a gas chamber rather than a shower!

Hoffmann doubts whether visitors actually believed that her *Public Showers* were an actual remnant of the past, but she has been assured by her viewers' comments that it was possible to view the showers in her intended context of gas chambers:

Actually, had that been a room on its own, then it would have been obvious: oh, what's in here, not much, ah – those showers. Then it would have been absolutely clear. But in such a large space, where all kinds of art is installed, you don't absolutely have to take note of them; and yet it still worked for some people in the manner I'd hoped for.

Because of the large open space, in which Hoffmann's installation both interacted with and was interfered by the other artists' works, she found that the showers alone were insufficient to illuminate the installation's intended meaning. Hoffmann therefore added a projection of the same four mannequin heads she later used again in her 1994 installation *The Hidden Smiles*:

I believe that I could not have actually installed these showers, only these showers and nothing else. In that art environment I found them insufficient, and therefore I added a projection of heads. They are mannequin heads that I found awhile back. I dressed them with bathing caps made of red-orange latex. I had already worked with those heads in the past and photographed them. I installed them in a constellation that suggests that they are actual people, and something is happening between them.

Hoffmann's installation is once again connected to the subject of childhood by the adolescent mannequin heads, but also to experiences in environments in which no one will interfere in a situation of violence. Not only children will find the weakest in order to mistreat him: "I used the showers as the kind of place where this is likely to happen because they are not under supervision. That (image of the mannequins) was projected. But maybe I only did that in order to defuse the

showers a bit, so that I don't install a gas chamber alone, but bring in that connotation."

Sometimes Hoffmann is surprised how little reaction there was when she showed her shower pieces in Germany. She feels that, overall, people are more likely to talk about her other, more neutral work. Hoffmann is pushing a subject matter uncomfortably close to the viewer – a subject we'd all rather avoid. She utilizes her expertise as an artist in a way that the experience of her pieces does not merely become an encounter with an uncomfortable situation, but involves us directly. Hoffmann's installations do not allow for a safe viewing position, as she is constantly looking for ways that will draw us into the piece. In effect, she implicates us in the disquieting processes that are illuminated in her installations. The commentary by Birgit Möckel in *Urbane Legenden* confirms that the link to Auschwitz is indeed unavoidable in Bettina Hoffmann's shower installations:

The sanitary rooms give off cold and inhumanity. Bettina Hoffmann has made them strange in her interpretation, an artificial space that we enter. The viewer takes on the role of the voyeur...this causes disquiet and fear, awakens the past: the death of countless humans in concentration camps.⁶⁰

The subject of the Holocaust weaves through the work of Bettina Hoffmann like a red thread. As a second-generation German visual artist living and practising in Germany, she cannot avoid linking right-radicalism in the present to her country's Third Reich past. Although at first she was unaware of the very direct links between her general themes (i.e., restrictions and limitations) to Nazi Germany, her stumbling over showers made her quickly aware of that fact. Since then she has confronted the underlying subject of the Third Reich and the Holocaust head on, although she sometimes questions the ethics of her practice:

In retrospect I should say this: I believe that sometimes one does that on purpose, to create a work about the Holocaust, but that isn't the

⁶⁰ Möckel, *Urbane Legenden*, n.p.

case with me: I wander from one thing to the other emotionally and thus it goes from skinheads to hair and leads me back to the showers. Maybe that's problematic. Somehow I have the feeling that with Holocaust – you can work with it in a scientific manner, but one actually should not deal with it on the emotional level or as the by-product of something else.

Because of the Holocaust's omnipresent legacy in contemporary Germany, Gentile German artists often find it difficult to find the right approach to it as a subject, if they approach the Holocaust at all.

In essence, the starting point to Hoffmann's pieces is usually not a fixed subject, but it develops, as it did in her shower pieces. Once Hoffmann sees the result of a certain installation, she becomes conscious of the underlying subject and other pieces may follow. To Hoffmann there is definitely an ongoing connection to Germany in her work as a professional artist. This is not something she deliberately strives for but is apparently something cannot avoid. In fact, Hoffmann contends that sometimes she wishes she were a painter instead: "Couldn't it be a bit easier sometimes? Maybe I need that somehow – sometimes I would love to simply paint pictures of flowers, and be satisfied by that – but it doesn't satisfy me."

Hoffmann's underlying subject matter of Nazi Germany keeps resurfacing, and has taken on the form of a more and more conscious encounter with the Third Reich over time: "It is actually not my subject. It just enters into it somehow. It enters into it alone because I am German, I believe." Although she would sometimes like to get rid of her art's involvement with the Third Reich and paint flowers instead, Hoffmann feels that, as a second-generation German artist, this is not a route open to her:

Then I would not be German. Actually, I would much rather not be German. All that ballast – well, its not actually ballast because I could distance myself from it – but there are people who have a much more positive feeling for their country, and maybe that would be nice, if I could have that.

Over the course of approximately five years, Hoffmann engaged herself repeatedly in encounters with the Third Reich. In her effective installations she is

not merely ridding herself of the demons that appear to haunt her, but instead has succeeded in devising complex strategies that invite not only contemplation but an active engagement in the subject matter by her audience. She not only wishes to confront the past, but also makes a sincere effort to understand how the present has been impacted by that past.

Without being reduced to mere political statements, Hoffmann's installations from the early to the mid 1990s show her to be an artist with a larger political understanding of underlying currents in Germany. Maybe her immigration to Canada could be viewed as the unavoidable result of an art practice that refuses to close its eyes in the face of a distressing past and present: "It naturally arises from my occupation with German history, whereas on the level of feelings I am on very emotional ground. Sometimes that feeling becomes defused abroad."

CHAPTER 7

Summary and Analysis of Findings

Project Overview

I initially became interested in this study because I wanted to find out whether there were other artists who, like me, belonged to a category of artists that I had termed “second-generation German visual art”: artists who are the direct descendants of Third Reich Germans, whose self-definition, press commentaries, choices of subject matter, and artistic approaches did not easily fit into the category that is commonly referred to as Holocaust art. The artists I was looking for, and found, were engaged in artistic processes that proved the existence of less overt, oblique encounters with the legacy of the Third Reich, in comparison to the premeditated, voluntary, or representational approaches common to Holocaust art.

In choosing a research model, I took inspiration from Dan-Bar On's *Legacy of Silence* (1989) and Ursula Hegi's *Tearing the Silence* (1998), two books with a narrative style in which the authors conducted in-depth interviews with two different groups of second-generation Germans. Instead of conducting a quantitative study, I researched select artists. The format of my study reflects my formation as an artist, with an art-historical and art-theoretical approach of interpretation and analysis rather than a psychological approach. My training as a visual artist also influenced the narrative and creative approaches I employed in writing my thesis. The inclusion of my own visual art practice in my doctoral thesis resulted in the exhibition and defence of select artworks that I produced during my studies. Rather than using clinical trauma theory as my point of departure, I took inspiration from the writings of Alice Miller, who discusses art as a tool of self-discovery and a means to approach childhood trauma. I also incorporate Eric

Santner's concept of the "labour of mourning," as well as Ernst Van Alphen's concept of "giving the past a place."

This chapter summarizes my findings by comparing the artists' work, based on the information that I gathered from the interviews with the artists, as well as from publicly available sources. The interview format made it possible for latent material to surface in conjunction with the legacy of Nazi Germany. Including myself as a research subject established an environment in which the subject of the Second World War, the Third Reich, and the Holocaust could be discussed on the personal level.

I originally asked myself the following three basic questions: are there artists whose practice can be categorized as second-generation German visual art in comparison to Holocaust art? If so, what defines it? And lastly, what might be the purpose of this art production? The five chapters on the artists here discuss how the subject of Nazi Germany was initially unpremeditated and or an oblique encounter in their work. In the case of Radecki, Rumland, myself, and Hoffmann, my study has substantiated that an art practice developed from initially subconscious encounters with the legacy of the Third Reich and moved to a more conscious art practice. In the case of Eva Brandl's work, although encounters with Germany's past remain more ambiguous and appear less conscious, there is nevertheless some surfacing of indirect encounters with the past in her practice.

What defines the art practice of these artists and makes it distinct from Holocaust art is not only the fact that the artists initially "stumbled" on the legacy of Nazi Germany in their art practice rather than embracing it consciously; they also tend to approach Germany's past through personal and indirect encounters with the remnants of this past rather than attempting to represent or retell its history. Childhood experience, rather than adult knowledge of the history of Nazi

Germany, tends to serve as a point of departure in the artists' encounters with that past.

It is in their negotiation of in-between spaces that the artists seek knowledge about a personal past that is rendered inaccessible through the official histories of the Third Reich. While Brigitte Radecki is reading between the lines, Suse Rumland is working in between layers, because as a "two-world" member (i.e., identifying with both victim and perpetrator) she always feels to be in between. The purpose of such an art practice is to search in between spaces for hidden secrets and untold stories of the past (Radecki), for an appropriate language with which to approach that past (Rumland), in order to rediscover what is lost (Brandl), to lend the dead a voice (Kessin), and to locate remnants of the past that continue to influence the present (Hoffmann). In their artistic approaches to the Third Reich legacy, these second-generation German artists contribute to the understanding of a past that is considered a rupture in modern history and does not affect Germans alone. Their art fills in some of the blanks in a major void that continues to affect subsequent generations. I propose that these artists are engaged in an active "labour of mourning," in order to "give the past a place."

Differences

The most notable differences among the artists pertain to their personal data. First, they are not all German citizens – Brigitte Radecki obtained Canadian citizenship at the age of twenty-one. Second, not all of the artists are Canadian residents – Suse Rumland is both a citizen and resident of Germany. Third, not all artists were born in Germany after the end of the Second World War in 1945, as Brigitte Radecki was born in 1940. Of the four artists residing in Canada, two immigrated to Canada as children with their German families in the immediate post-war period (Brandl and Radecki); the other two immigrated to Canada as adults

in order to join their Canadian partners (Kessin and Hoffmann). While none of the artists considers themselves to be Holocaust artists, and none have been discussed in that specific context, four of them have consciously shown artwork relating to the Third Reich in recent exhibitions (Radecki, Rumland, Kessin, and Hoffmann), whereas the fifth, Eva Brandl, has not, though she allows for the possibility of such a connection in her work. The artists generally do not draw attention to the fact that they are German, with the exception of Kessin. Suse Rumland is the only artist of German-Jewish parentage. In press interviews she often accentuates her Jewish-German background.

In addition to these personal differences, there appears to be a distinct difference between the work of those artists who are Canadian residents and born near the beginning of the second generation (Radecki and Brandl) and those Canadian residents who were born later on (Kessin and Hoffmann). The general level of ambiguity in approaching the subject matter of the Third Reich appears to change to more direct engagements with the past in the later-born artists' practice. Especially in the work of Bettina Hoffmann, the youngest of the artists, a more direct and less personal approach becomes visible. This may be due to the fact that those of Hoffmann's artworks I analyzed were conceptualized for and exhibited in Germany, but may also point towards a lesser entanglement with the legacy of Nazi Germany in the case of the younger second generation, as knowledge about that era becomes less taboo and more accessible to Germans. This became apparent in my interview with Hoffmann.

Similarities

Numerous similarities between the five artists' themes and approaches establish important links between the art practices of this "random" group of second-generation artists. I view the artists as a random group because I contacted

them based on their German background and year of birth, eliminating only those who knowingly appeared to be engaged in a Holocaust discourse from the onset. Because I did not assemble a group of second-generation German visual artists based on the similarities in their art practice, I find the significant number of similarities in their work particularly revealing. As most of the shared motifs relate to the subject of Germany, they indicate a latent obsession with Germany's past, and a wish to work through the traumatic residue of that past. In my analysis of their practice, I have grouped the artworks and approaches according to general shared themes.

Archaeological/Architectural Approaches

In their installations all five artists employ what I call an archaeological/architectural approach, which functions to achieve what Ernst Van Alphen calls "giv[ing] the past a place."⁶¹ That is, each artistic engagement with the legacy of Nazi Germany – particularly the Holocaust – that is not representation, but instead lets the audience "experience" directly a certain aspect of the Holocaust or of Nazism, can be thought of as an experience that Van Alphen has called a "Holocaust effect." According to Van Alphen, in such moments the past is not re-presented, but rather presented or re-enacted, which effectively gives the past a place in the present. In other words,

A confrontation with Nazism or with the Holocaust by means of a re-enactment here takes place within the representational realm of art. Our access to this past is no longer mediated by the account of a witness or a narrator, or by the eye of a photographer. We will not respond to a re-presentation of the historical event, but to a presentation or performance of it. Our response, therefore, will be direct or firsthand in a different way.⁶²

⁶¹ Ernst Van Alphen, *Caught by History: Holocaust Effects in Contemporary Art, Literature, and Theory* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1997).

⁶² Van Alphen, *Caught by History*, 11.

With their archaeological and architectural approaches, the artists provide environments and approaches in which a re-enactment of certain aspects of the past, rather than its representation, can be experienced first-hand by the audience.

For example, an archaeological approach in the work of Radecki is manifested in her “digging” for censored writers in Nazi Germany in the State Library of Berlin. Radecki’s painterly techniques are indicative of an archaeological approach as well: her painting series called *Burnt Poems* is executed in layering techniques. In one of these works, Radecki applied “invisible” marks with a medium filled syringe – marks that can be discovered by the viewer only at certain angles of light. This invites the viewer into an archaeological process of discovery. Similarly, the viewing of *Sand Columns* involves the slow process of discovery of the various materials and methods used in the building of that architecture, as well as the eventual discovery that this stable-looking installation is less solid than it initially appears. Brigitte Radecki’s *Sand Columns* is based on the artist’s visit to an archaeological site. With *Sand Columns* Radecki has built a piece reminiscent of an actual archaeological site relocated in a modern context. In the construction of the piece, Radecki becomes an architect, having to familiarize herself with architectural history, method, and design. Her architecture becomes inhabited by the gallery audience and, as I suggested in chapter 2, might provide an adequate residence for “ghosts from the past.”

Like Radecki, Suse Rumland employs an archaeological approach in her early series of layer paintings, as well as in her tower series. Rumland’s habitual method of first covering and then uncovering layers of paint, which includes erasing and scratching techniques, is reminiscent of an archaeological practice of search and discovery. In the production of her layered works, Rumland is taking on the role of an archaeologist in her attempt to uncover a Jewish German past that is lost to her native Germany. Rumland also conducts archaeological research in her ongoing

search for discarded toys that evoke Germany's recent past, a collection of objects that she reassembles in her *Tierchen* photo series. In their connection to the audience's personal childhoods, these assemblies of objects become highly involving to the viewer. As an architect Rumland also builds what she calls "life designs" on a "mountain of grief" – the rubble left by the Third Reich – in her tower series. We can also see her interest in architecture in her piece in the exhibition *Emergency*. In that installation the artist re-enacts or reconstructs select components of the concentration camp, Theresienstadt, in an old, abandoned hospital. Providing her audience with a view on the hospital's laundry chimney – which Rumland refers to as a "crematorium" in reference to Theresienstadt – the room becomes an architecture of the past, which offers the viewer a glimpse of the original, if fake, bathrooms of the concentration camp on the photographs installed under the installation site's window. It is effective in luring the audience into that past, to contemplate their own involvement with the history of Germany's concentration camps, rather than providing the safe viewing distance of a historical rendition of the subject.

Eva Brandl's interest in architecture has been ongoing and consistent. Not only is her father an architect but Brandl herself initially had an interest in studying architecture and temporarily studied stage design before becoming a professional artist. Brandl's interest in architecture is particularly visible in her early installations, *The Golden Gates* and *Model for a Temple of Reason*. In both installation pieces, the artist uses architectural approaches in the construction of her small-scale models as well as in their enlargement into actual pieces of architecture, which she builds with stage design techniques. Brandl's elaborate sites invite her viewers into an archaeological process to discover the various elements the pieces are composed of, and viewers have to actively engage themselves in the process of making meaning. Another connection to the subject of architecture is the fact that Brandl's point of

departure for her *Model for a Temple of Reason* is a slide of an architectural design by a German architect. Her interest in the layers of history is also apparent in her close connection to the visible remains of the past in her Clark Street studio space, to which her early work was site specific. As she mentioned in my interview with her, the marks left by the former inhabitants of the space were an important influence on her artistic process:

These early pieces were tied to the Clark Street Studio, with all it had on its walls. It was a very "defunct" space, and you could find all kinds of things written on the wall, like evidence perhaps. There was a lot of history there... I had a lot of communication with that space, with memories, with things I would find.

As an "archaeologist," Brandl occasionally includes discarded objects in her work. These found objects are remnants of the past, such as the broken piece of glass that takes on the function of the protagonist in *The Golden Gates*.

In my own work, an architectural approach is most apparent in my illusionary "rooms" on canvas, which are void of the human figure, and thus meant to be inhabited by the gallery audience in my effort to establish a connection between my own experience and that of my viewers. In series, these paintings of rooms create a "house" in a given gallery space, to which I sometimes add pieces of "furniture": these additional pieces have the semblance of actual furniture, such as the radio cabinet called *Little Rascal*, the school desk in *Bad Girl*, and the canvas I named *Inheritance* which I installed on table legs (it lures the viewer into the installation by providing a familiar domestic environment). My consistent employment of trompe l'oeil techniques plays further with perceptions of space and the built environment. The technique creates the impression that the viewer is interacting with actual three-dimensional objects when approaching a canvas from a certain angle. Other work is closer to archaeological uncovering, especially in my collection and employment of the countless artifacts that I inherited and gathered over the years. They are mainly artifacts that stem from a time in Germany before

my birth and often represent individuals I was told about but never met – people who died before I was born. By repainting these artifacts on canvas, I attempt to reconstruct knowledge about a lost past and its people, like an archaeologist who attempts to piece together artifacts in order to discover lost truths about past people.

In the early work of Bettina Hoffmann, an architectural approach is both obvious and consistent. Because she has worked for film set construction in the past, she often takes on the role of a designer or architect in the creation of her sculptural pieces, such as in the construction of her piece called *Pedagogical Toy*. In *Pedagogical Toy*, Hoffmann has designed and built an actual house, a small-scale version of a typical German design to which she added hand-painted detail before burning it down. Hoffmann's interest in built environments can also be seen in her repeated use of actual architectural blueprints of detention centres and jails in her installations. Frequently the artist refurbishes abandoned architectural spaces, which she then turns into believable architectural environments by adding simple props. For example, the non-functional showers the artist installed in her piece *Public Showers* momentarily give the viewer the illusion of being in contact with actual remnants of Germany's past, so the piece becomes highly involving. Hoffmann's art practice also delves into history, especially in her various installations in uninhabited spaces that still carry the mark of those who lived there in the past. The artist integrates additional elements into these remains from another era, thus linking it to the present. This type of archaeological approach is apparent in Hoffmann's shower installation called *Acid Bath*. The exhibition site featured the original turquoise and pink colours of the wall. The colours inspired Hoffmann's allusion to a public pool and Caucasian skin-colour. In some of the non-functional architectural spaces that Hoffman uses for her installations, she

manages to momentarily convince the viewer that her installations may in fact be the archaeological remnants of the past, or may still be in use.

Theatrical Approach

According to Ernst Van Alphen, the debate about Holocaust representations has been unanimous on the point that the survivors of the Holocaust and successive generations have a special responsibility to keep the historical events alive.⁶³ For my purposes, this notion of responsibility can be extended to also include the entire second generation of Germans. Keeping a historical event alive, rather than representing it, means to set a stage for players who can participate in the re-enactment or performance of the past event. The artists' use of installation in their architectural and archaeological approaches to the past aids this process. It is further facilitated by what I call a theatrical approach that is employed by all the artists in my study. Such an approach speaks of a wish to involve the audience in the work on the participatory level, as actor rather than observer.

Brigitte Radecki purposely constructed *Sand Columns* in a manner that gives away the fact that the columns are less solid and ancient than they may appear on first sight, revealing to the audience that the columns are props rather than the solid components of an actual structure. The audience discovers that the columns are modern "fakes" because Radecki has exposed her method of construction from certain vantage points.

Suse Rumland's education in psychodrama paralleled her evolution as an exhibiting artist. For example, in the exhibition *Emergency*, the viewer becomes a player in a drama that is the artist's re-enactment of a past reality, the concentration camp Theresienstadt. In her *Tierchen* photo series, Rumland stages a variety of

⁶³ Van Alphen, *Caught by History*, 93.

plastic figurines in scenes related to the subject of Nazi Germany. The viewer is encouraged to locate herself in the scenes and construct her own histories by connecting the colourful toys to her personal childhood.

Having studied theatre design, Eva Brandl built her early installations *Golden Gates* and *Model for a Temple of Reason* with stage-building techniques. In the process of exploring these complex environments, the viewers become players in Brandl's elaborately constructed scenes. Like Radecki, Brandl purposely exposes the fact that her architectural elements are theatre stage constructs by revealing the underlying structures to the audience. The theatre stage reappears in *Faust ou la Tentation du Possible*. In this sculptural installation, Brandl has built a miniature theatre stage for her Faust/Beuys protagonist, a puppet that, according to Brandl, symbolizes "the lonely actor." In fact, "Faust" was traditionally performed as a puppet play in Germany. Other connections to the theatre in Brandl's work are apparent in her dramatic use of lighting, her use of projections, and in the huge set of curtains that separate the actual "temple" in *Model for a Temple of Reason* from the rest of the installation.

In my own work, the audience becomes the involuntary "actor" in the rooms that I create on canvas, which are purposely void of the human figure so that the viewer can take the place of the protagonist. Examples are the paintings *Baking Little Men* and *To Dear Mother*. What helps to make the viewer the actor in my environments is the fact that many of these "environments" are painted from a bird's eye view, which visually makes the viewer "fall" into the painting. The fact that my paintings create an environment in series, rather than functioning as single canvasses alone, furthers the illusion that the viewer becomes an actor on my stage. A straightforward connection to the theatre is already apparent in one of my earliest paintings, *Encore Anyone?* which represents an actual theatre stage, replete with actors, stage props, and stage curtains made from the German flag. In other

work, I also occasionally use props in painting installations, such as the pieces *Bad Girl* and *Little Rascal*, which connects my work to the audience's familiar domestic environments.

In Bettina Hoffmann's work, it is obvious that she utilizes her background as a film prop builder in the construction of her installations, as she builds her sculptural elements with set-building techniques. Hoffmann habitually involves her audience as actors/participants in the complex social settings she creates. An example is her piece *Caught*, in which the projection of German words pertaining to the judiciary system actually "catch" the audience in a situation that positions them as the representatives of the system's opposing sides.

In their employment of installation practices, all artists establish environments in which the audience is encouraged to take on the role of participant rather than being allowed a safe viewing distance. For example, this is already the case in my early painting, *To Lend the Dead a Voice*, in which the viewer is beckoned to take a seat on an empty chair. Other pieces that actively involve the audience as participants rather than observers alone are my sound installation *Little Rascal* and Eva Brandl's *Model for a Temple of Reason*, which involve the audience through similar devices. In the *Little Rascal* it is the audience who "causes" the verbal attack of the piece by setting off a motion detector; in *Model for a Temple of Reason* the viewer's entrance into the exhibition site initiates the projection of the slide *Guardians of Fire*. In conjunction with an architectural and theatrical approach, mirrors feature in the installations of Radecki (*Sand Columns*), Rumland (*Emergency*), Brandl (*Golden Gates*), and Hoffmann (*Acid Bath*). They relate to the artists' ongoing concern to involve the audience in their pieces. Through the use of mirrors, the level of audience participation is heightened by their own reflection and a general sense of disorientation.

Germany

In his work on mourning and post-war memory, Eric Santner claims that

Mourning requires the availability of a "good-enough environmental provision," a dependable interpersonal rapport that first provides a space in which the work of mourning can unfold. To reiterate an earlier formulation, mourning without the solidarity of some such interpersonal rapport would signal the advent of madness.⁶⁴

If, as Santner argues, a safe environment is crucial in order to accomplish mourning, in the case of four of the artists I studied, it appears that physical distance from Germany may have contributed to the development of such a space in which the work of mourning with regards to the Third Reich legacy can unfold. Suse Rumland is the only one of the artists who resides in Germany. Due to her Jewish German heritage, she considers herself an outsider and thus apart from most other Germans – a "stranger." For that reason she establishes a "space for strangeness" through her art practice. It is a space in which the work of mourning can unfold. In the case of all artists, an art and exhibition practice provide a sense of belonging and the establishment of community, allowing for a "good enough environmental provision." In fact, a similar search for community is what inspired my search for artists with similar artistic development to my own I wanted to establish interpersonal rapport and a space in which the development of a second-generation German art practice can unfold. Because the first generation failed to work through the legacy of the Third Reich, this second generation is involved in a process of mourning, despite their distance from Germany, or perhaps because of it. In fact, it may well be the very distance from their native country that provides the necessary safety in order to deal with what must be perceived as unsafe territory to a second-generation German artist.

⁶⁴ Eric Santner, *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory and Film in Postwar Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 53.

Occasionally links to the past become apparent in the artists' use of symbols pertaining to Germany. Sometimes this appears to be an obvious and conscious decision, at other times oblique and possibly unintentional. Among obvious references, the German flag appears in two artists' works that have been discussed. In Eva Brandl's *Faust ou La Tentation du Possible*, the German flag appears in the colours of the cloth-draped pulpits. This came to the artist's attention only after she had already installed the piece. In my own art practice, many of my early drawings and paintings featured either the colours of the German flag or the actual flag itself, among them *Encore Anyone?* in which the German flag functioned as the curtain of a theatre stage. Another visual link to the subject of Germany is the motif of the oak, which surfaces in the work of two artists. An oak leaf features in Eva Brandl's *Faust; Les Sortilèges*, and in *Letters from the Front* I used oak leaves as a referent to Germany in general, and mass death in the Second World War in particular.

German personae feature prominently in the artists' work. In the case of Rumland and Hoffmann this appears less significant, as they live(d) in Germany during the production period of the pieces under discussion. In the art practice of Suse Rumland, the disappearance of the Jewish German population of the Third Reich frequently enters into the meaning of her pieces. In Rumland's installation piece, *Emergency*, she photographed her parents and displayed their photo on the wall of the exhibition site, in order to symbolically re-enact the past and to reinstate a missing German population. Generally the inclusion of German personae in the artists' work is intentional, at other instances unpremeditated. Brigitte Radecki "stumbled" across Else Lasker-Schüler during her research in the Berlin State Library. Eva Brandl, who considers the German artist Joseph Beuys a major influence in her evolution as a professional artist, used a slide by German architect Friedrich Gilly as a point of departure in *Model for a Temple of Reason*. Although the artist considers this coincidental, she contends that, had she not started with an

image by a German architect, something else would have led her to the inclusion of German subject matter in the work. Brandl's recent occupation with Goethe's original Faust, based on the German character of Dr. Johannes Faust, is another indication of her preoccupation with German subject matter and personae. In my own work German persons figure prominently, such as in the series *Still Alive*, a series of "portraits" of my German family. The series includes the piece *Inheritance*, in which I copied the drawings of two German artists, my mother and Leo Haas. In *Little Rascal* I used two German books, the *Struwwelpeter* by Heinrich Hoffmann from 1840, and the *Struwwelliese*, a children's book from the 1960s (by Cilly Schmitt-Teichmann).

The Third Reich

Although the artists' involvement with the subject of Germany may be tied to their German background, in the case of those artworks that deal specifically with the subject matter of the Third Reich it is evident that their efforts are aimed at exploring an apparent void in the history of Germany. This historical void is described in *Caught by History* by Ernst Van Alphen who suggests that the Holocaust has disrupted every conventional notion of history. According to Van Alphen, although the actual events are over and belong to the past, the experience of those events continues.⁶⁵ The author proposes that this history is therefore at once in the past and in the present, and so the cultural responsibility that befalls those living now is to establish contact with that past. All of the artists I have researched have established contact with the past of Nazi Germany – especially in those of their works that approach the legacy of the Third Reich.

⁶⁵ Van Alphen, *Caught by History*, 93.

In the case of these artists, I suspect that, as Eric Santner argues, "the traces of the Holocaust within the otherwise normal domesticity of the present, forces the second generation into a more direct and sustained labour of mourning regarding the material and symbolic inheritance left by the generation of the (grand)fathers."⁶⁶ Unlike second-generation Germans in general, those second-generation German artists who are actively engaged in a labour of mourning further their chances of working through traumatic residue and making their progress accessible to the larger community – even if they don't name it that way themselves.

For example, despite her recent efforts to deal with the legacy of the Third Reich consciously, both artistically and on the personal level, Brigitte Radecki stresses that she does not consider herself to be a Holocaust artist, and does not wish to be viewed within that category of artists. Still Radecki feels that, as a second-generation German, she has no choice in dealing with the legacy of the Third Reich: "It's the last generation that really has direct experience and yet is not that much part of it as our parents were. It is our duty, in a sense." This sentiment seems to be an undercurrent in the practice of second-generation German artists. Therefore, even though none of the five artists considers themselves to be Holocaust artists, references to concentration camps come up in their art practice without exception.

At times, the viewer finds Holocaust references whether the artist has intended them or not. For example, with regards to Radecki's *Sand Columns*, the subject of Germany's concentration camps is hinted at by a *Montreal Gazette* columnist, who refers to the installation in the context of "shower stalls" and "coffins" when, in fact, the piece was inspired by the artist's visit of an archaeological gravesite in England. However, the concentration camps of Nazi

⁶⁶ Santner, *Stranded Objects*, 43-44.

Germany implicitly enter into Radecki's art practice in the working title of her latest series of paintings, *Burnt Poets*, which was exhibited under the title *Burnt Poems*. Radecki changed the original title, because it evoked the killing and cremation of persecuted authors in the Third Reich. On two occasions the artist has worked with the subject of censored and persecuted authors in the Third Reich. Although Else Lasker-Schüler and Irmgard Keun were not killed by the Nazis, many other authors under persecution did find their death in Germany's concentration camps, among them Charlotte Salomon, Gertrud Kolmar, and Else Ury.

In the case of Suse Rumland, concentration camps and crematoria furnaces enter frequently into her art production, without necessarily being the actual subject of a given work: the history of Rumland's Jewish German father in the Third Reich became entangled in both the artist's life and her art practice. As Rumland explained in the interview, water and clouds habitually stand for ashes in her work, and ashes are a direct reference to the crematoria of Auschwitz. As many of Rumland's works feature water and clouds, this is evidently an ongoing subliminal preoccupation. Suse Rumland specifically has worked with the theme of concentration camps on two occasions. Her installation in *Emergency* included actual photographs of the bathrooms in the Theresienstadt concentration camp, while the view through the window of the exhibition site confronted the audience with a chimney in reference to Nazi Germany's extermination camps. Rumland included a photo of her parents in the exhibition, which was taken while they were viewing Rumland's installation. The photo reminds us of the persecution of her Jewish German father in the Third Reich and the threat of his deportation to Theresienstadt. In Rumland's shower series, the connection to the extermination of persecuted individuals in the Third Reich may be less obvious (unless one is familiar with the artist's biography and general symbolism), but even without access to the artist's biography, viewers recognize the sinister aspect of these

extermination camp showers. Those of Rumland's works that combine the symbols of fire and water confirm to the audience that her showers indeed are those used for killing persecuted individuals in the Third Reich. Like Rumland's father, most of the victims were German Jews, whose bodies were later cremated.

Eva Brandl's *Model for a Temple of Reason* is based on a projected slide of a smelter that was never built, the design of a German architect. In the installation she has built a large-scale model of the original design. It is initially hidden from the audience by a large, dark theatre curtain. Not only is the model of the smelter reminiscent of a concentration camp crematorium, but the projection the audience encounters before discovering the "Temple" shows figures who are stoking an furnace. When I first researched the work of Eva Brandl, this slide in particular caught my attention, as I could not help being reminded of Auschwitz. Brandl's installation features German writing on the wall: *Natur, Mathematik, Antike*. It reminds me of Suse Rumland's studio wall, on which she has written a statement by a concentration camp survivor who used to be forced to shovel corpses into the crematorium ovens of Auschwitz (that is, "friends from hell are a very rare thing").

Several of my works directly refer to Germany's concentration camps. In *Inheritance* I copied concentration camp images by artist Leo Haas onto canvas and signed them with his name. Other direct references to concentration camps are apparent in both the *Grim Reaper* – particularly in the painting *Auschwitz* – and in several images of the Photoshop series, *A is for Auschwitz*. The *Little Rascal* is related to the subject of concentration camps as well. One of the illustrated stories from Heinrich Hoffmann that I painted on the sides of the radio cabinet is that of "Paulinchen," who disobeys her parents by playing with matches when she is home alone, and burns to death. A subconscious reference to the crematoria of Auschwitz became clear to me only after I had finished the painting entitled *Baking Little Men*.

Bettina Hoffmann worked with the theme of concentration camps on three occasions in her shower installations. Her involvement with the theme gradually changed from oblique to direct encounters with the history of Nazi Germany's concentration camps. Although Hoffmann seemingly could not avoid working with the subject several times, the work causes her discomfort and she sometimes does not include the documentation in her portfolio.

Fire thematically enters into all the artists' work. In the context of second-generation German art, fire may be interpreted as a reference to destruction in general, but can also be seen as a reference to the book-burnings of the Third Reich and the crematoria of Auschwitz. In Brigitte Radecki's work, the subject of fire features in the title *Burnt Poems*. The title directly relates to censorship of the written language, but indirectly evokes the bodily persecution of the authors in the Third Reich. The subject of fire similarly enters into Suse Rumland's installation piece for *Emergency* (with its crematorium chimney), as well as into those of her paintings which depict fire and ashes. Fire is also an important aspect in Eva Brandl's *The Golden Gates* in the destruction of the ocean liner, *Mauritania*, and in the model of a smelter in *Model for a Temple of Reason*. In my own work, fire and burning feature in my canvasses *Baking Little Men* and *Auschwitz*, as well as in the sound installation *Little Rascal*. Fire most prominently features in Bettina Hoffmann's *Pedagogical Toy*, not just symbolically, but literally and actively because the artist constructed the house with the sole purpose of burning it down.

Authority

In conjunction with the artists' frequent involvement with the subject matter of Germany in general and that of the Third Reich in particular, the subject of authority frequently enters into their practice. In my summary of how each artist deals with the issue of authority, I include related themes of the military, jails, and

violence. The rationale for this inclusion comes from my interview with Bettina Hoffmann, who stated: "Military means authority, and when you arrive at the military you are right next to the Third Reich."

The legacy of Third Reich authority haunts the second generation of Germany, often manifesting itself in symptoms, which are, as Eric Santner reminds us in *Stranded Objects*,

traces of another, unconscious reality that haunts one's conscious reality like a revenant being. In the present context, they would be the traces of knowledge denied, of deeds undone, of eyes averted from pain, of shades drawn, of moments when it might have been possible to ask a question or to resist, but one didn't ask and one didn't resist.⁶⁷

According to Santner, the first generation missed the "chance for solidarity with (or later, mourning for) the victims" so it is now up to the second generation to somehow deal with these lost chances. In fact, Santner believes that post-war generations might be able to create "an alternative legacy out of the archive of symptoms and parapraxes that bear witness to what could have been but was not."

By searching out these signs of a history-that-might-have-been in the documents of their own lineage, the post-war generations can begin to mourn these lost opportunities without disavowing their ancestry. These generations may yet be able to unearth new resources of identification out of the unconscious layers of the history into which they were born.⁶⁸

Certainly none of these artists are disavowing their history – and in fact they may be, as Santner suggests, "unearthing new resources of identification out of the unconscious layers of the history into which they were born." The artists' frequent involvement with the subject of authority and related themes – from prisons and institutions to burned books and fairy tales about punishment – is indicative of

⁶⁷ Santner, 152.

⁶⁸ Santner, 153.

their concern with the authoritative modes that contributed to the birth of the Third Reich. Although, as members of the second generation, the consequences of authoritative modes that led to violence at its extreme, in approaching the subject through their art practice they can establish a space for empathy for the victims of this process without limiting their interest to the past alone. In a sense, then, the artists are engaged in an empathetic process that should have been carried out by their parental generation in the Third Reich era. As Eric Santner sees it, such empathy is crucial in the process of mourning:

The capacity to feel grief for others and guilt for the suffering one has directly or indirectly caused, depends on the capacity to experience empathy for the other as other. This capacity in turn depends on the successful working through of those primitive experiences of mourning which first consolidate the boundaries between self and other, thereby opening up a space for empathy.⁶⁹

The involvement of the artists with the theme of authority and its harmful consequences contributes to the opening up of spaces for empathy in connection to the legacy of Nazi Germany, particularly in their frequent engagement with the subject of authority and its effects. In the words of Eric Santner, a practice that includes the “free association between emotions and events” ultimately grounds the human capacity to bear witness to history and to claim solidarity with the oppressed of history, past and present.⁷⁰

On the personal level, Brigitte Radecki voiced her concern about the authoritarian modes of behaviour she initially encountered when visiting Germany as an adult. In her art practice, the subject of authority and violence is explored in her works on Third Reich censorship of authors in *Reading between the Lines* and *Burnt Poems*.

⁶⁹ Santner, 7.

⁷⁰ Santner, 162.

For Suse Rumland authoritarian structures in Germany created a problem during her Fine Art studies in Munich. Rumland left the Academy because she encountered what she considered authoritarian structures in the leftist scene. They frightened her, especially since they caused her "to act tough." Ironically she perceived the political left of the student body in the 1960s as too authoritarian for her to remain comfortable as a student at the Art Academy. In Rumland's work, authority is explored in the unbalanced power relations in a number of her *Tierchen* photos, such as the image of the "mother" rabbit who devotedly bows to two "brown-shirts." The subject of violence becomes particularly apparent in the *Tierchen* photos depicting a "crime scene" and the "German girl's" red-stained hands.

Authority in connection to Germany became an issue for Eva Brandl on the personal level when she applied and was accepted to study art in Germany. When she visited the art school, she perceived a strictness and rigidity she could not live with. Her encounter reminded her of the strictness she had experienced in German schools as a young child. As an adult she decided that she could not possibly expose herself voluntarily to such authoritarian structures. In Brandl's work, the issue of authority is explored in *Model for a Temple of Reason* – a temple being an ultimate symbol for the authoritarian structure of an accepted belief system, in this case the belief in reason.

Authoritarian structures in Germany encouraged me to leave Germany permanently. As a nineteen-year-old, I had been anonymously accused of being a Baader-Meinhof conspirator by unidentified neighbours in a well-to-do neighbourhood in Hamburg. They had watched me moving into my parents' empty apartment with a mattress, a baby, and not much else. After an anonymous phone call, a special police terror unit carrying guns was sent and pushed its way into my apartment. They collected my passport, as well as the passport of my baby, in order

to enter us into the government's "potential conspirator" data bank, despite having found no indication of my involvement. The incident was very frightening and reminiscent of the stories I had been told about *Gestapo* practices in Third Reich Germany. It confirmed to me that Germany could not be my home. Authority has always frightened me, and frequently enters into the subject matter of my art practice. Of those works I discussed, the subject of authority is most visible in the pieces *Little Rascal*, and *I won't eat my soup*. Rather than merely illustrating the subject of authority, both pieces show certain aspects of authority that personally involve the viewer. The *Little Rascal* in particular produces what Van Alphen has coined a "Holocaust effect," without explicitly evoking the subject matter of the Third Reich.⁷¹ That is, although the work is not obviously "about" the Holocaust, it nevertheless subjects the viewer to a form of violence and power – with an explicitly German flavour. With its authoritative verbal abuse in German – reminiscent of both the military and *Lager* language – along with its narrated themes of violence and death by fire, it invokes a concentration camp past without limiting the piece's meaning to that past, especially because the installation involves the viewer's participation in the present. It is, after all, the viewer herself, who both causes and is subjected to the abusive conduct of the *Little Rascal*.

To Bettina Hoffmann, perhaps more than any of the artists discussed here, authoritarian behaviour is clearly, dramatically, and consciously connected with Germany, and she was glad to leave them behind by emigrating to Canada. Bettina Hoffmann explained in the interview that she generally experienced Berlin as an authoritarian environment. Already as a young child, on visits from West Berlin to West Germany, encounters with the authoritarian East German border guards impressed her negatively. She says of herself:

⁷¹ Van Alphen, *Caught by History*, 99.

I am also quite marked by hierarchies. When someone is a bit authoritative, that frightens me immediately. I am sure that this comes through my family as well, as my father was very authoritarian. Although on the one hand this is a personal experience for me, it also complies with the general image of Germany: authoritarian and hierarchical.

Hoffmann's disdain for authoritarian structures in general, and particularly in Germany, in conjunction with her native country's Third Reich past, are well articulated in the interview:

In Germany there is always that connection: in the house where I lived I had the impression that the janitor had been "Blockwart" in the Third Reich, and that he certainly would have denounced Jews. Such thoughts I have in Germany. He was extremely authoritarian, but when you would talk with him he would suddenly shrink [...] You will find that here [in Canada] as well, but here I don't have that feeling.

Because she has been deeply marked by authoritarian structures, authority as a theme features prominently in Bettina Hoffmann's work. Authority is explored in her works on jails as well as dormitories – places of children's confinement rather than places of loving upbringing – and in her explorations of those social situations in which there is an imbalance of power present among the participating individuals. The installation *Caught* is a particularly interesting exploration of the issue of authority because it enables the viewer to change positions between the one who exerts authority, and the one who is the object of authority. Hoffmann's interest in the subject of authority is generally combined with her interest in childhood. Her work generally explores social situations that reveal someone's power over another. For example, in *Caught* and *The Emptied Dream*, Hoffmann integrated the blueprints of actual jails. In *Pedagogical Toy* the artist actively explored an act of violence by contemplating and carrying out the burning of the small model house she built. The subject of violence is also visible in the pieces of broken glass that the artist placed underneath her *Public Showers*, and in the photo of the distraught child in *Acid Bath*, who is forced by an adult to learn how to swim.

Connected to each of the artists' concern with the subject of authority – both on the personal level and in their art practice – are the subjects of war and the military, jails, and the subject of violence in general. Brigitte Radecki makes direct reference to the military in her painting *The Blue Piano*, in which piano keys march across the canvas like soldiers. *Sand Columns* is reminiscent of a place of confinement, and violence is unambiguously expressed in Radecki's "slashing" marks on her *Sanatorium Agra*.

Because of her father's history, the work of Suse Rumland generally relates to the Second World War. *Exodus*, a painting that shows the attempted flight of German Jews from Nazi Germany, has the general look of a jail, especially with the trees behind the boat that are lined up like jail bars. A chair constructed of metal mesh wire, visible in the *Tierchen* photo of a "crime scene," functions as a visible reminder of a jail as well. The subject of violence in Rumland's work is most constant and apparent in her mark-making, such as scratching and the elimination of layers and images through over-painting.

Eva Brandl very subtly connects to the subject of war through her inclusion of childhood memories. In *Faust ou la Tentation du Possible* she points out the connection of the drapery to the army blankets of her childhood. The felt-clad Faust/Beuys is yet another indirect reference to World War II, as Beuys claimed to have survived death during the war by being wrapped in felt. Brandl's use of the oak leaf links her work to the Second World War, as the oak leaf featured prominently in medals awarded to German soldiers, as well as in the general decorum of the Third Reich. There are no direct references to jails in Brandl's work, but in her use of doors and curtains she strategically creates closed-off spaces in her installations, which don't give away immediately what we may encounter behind them. The subject of violence further enters into *The Golden Gates*, through her "destruction" of the ocean liner *Mauritania* by fire.

The subject of the military, jails, and war also enter into my work frequently, such as in the paintings *Letters from the Front*, which features a German toy soldier, and *Inheritance*, which features Third Reich Germans in uniform. Leo Haas's images, which I copied in *Inheritance*, depict concentration camp inmates behind a fence and locked into a jail yard. The subject of violence is apparent in many of my works. An example is *Baking Little Men* with its depiction of a mutilated gingerbread man and a pair of scissors that appears to threaten a portrait of myself as a small child.

Ghosts from the Past

Unspeakable acts of Third Reich violence continue to haunt the present like ghosts from the past. In fact, my initial involvement in this project was based on the feeling of being haunted by the past. Thus the subject of ghosts, both literally and metaphorically, entered into my art production on several occasions. I am aware that I am not alone with the feeling of being haunted by the legacy of the Third Reich, particularly as a second-generation German. In the case of second-generation German artists, invisible and unspeakable terrors from the past sometimes visibly appear in a work – uninvited as well as voluntarily. In looking at similarities I have combined the subject of ghosts from the past with the subject of death.

Eric Santner's notion of traumatic haunting is useful to the discussion here. Santner claims that

the legacies – or perhaps more accurately: the ghosts, the revenant objects – of the Nazi period are transmitted to the second and third generations at the sites of the primal scenes of socialization, that is, within the context of a certain psychopathology of the postwar family. The postwar generations face the complex task of constituting stable self-identities by way of identification with parents and grandparents who, in the worst possible cases, may have been directly implicated in crimes of unspeakable dimensions.⁷²

⁷² Santner, 35.

Santner's statement provides a link to the artists' frequent occupation with the subject of ghosts and death. By approaching the ghosts of the past and facing past crimes, they are using their artistic agency in establishing new territory upon which to construct an identity apart from their parental generation.

In the work of Brigitte Radecki, ghostly presences from the past surface in *Sand Columns*, a piece initially inspired by an ancient gravesite. Radecki's *Burnt Poets*, the working title of *Burnt Poems*, is a reference to authors killed in the Third Reich. In fact, both *Reading between the Lines* and *Burnt Poems* give some of those authors a new life in the present. In the work of Suse Rumland, ashes, water, and showers stand for the mass killings in Nazi extermination camps. The artist acknowledges that through her father's history she feels haunted by the past. And while Eva Brandl's projections create ghostly presences in her installations, her focus on Faust – the man who loses his soul and life to the devil – also speaks to the Third Reich's Faustian deal. My own work called *The Grim Reaper* (which is another term for death), is also the main subject of the series' paintings, such as *Endangered Species*, *Kristallnacht*, and *Auschwitz*. *Still Alive*s mostly features those of my family members who have died. The subject of death is also evident in my use of skeletons and angels, depicted in pairs in *Encore Anyone* and *To Dear Mother*. There are ghosts from the past having a tea party in my painting *To Lend the Dead a Voice*. Bettina Hoffmann's installations take place in abandoned environments that appear to be haunted by ghosts from the past, and Neo-Nazi attacks caused the burning death of Turkish immigrants to Germany that inspired Hoffmann's piece *Pedagogical Toy*.

Some of the artists employ humour or irony in order to defuse overly grave subject matter. Or perhaps the humour is used in a way somewhat similar to

Mikhail Bakhtin's description of the medieval carnival functioning to defeat fear.⁷³ In my own art practice, for example, the inclusion of humour allows the audience to approach a piece's difficult subject by softening its impact, but it further enables me to carry out a work that includes a traumatizing aspect. Some of Hoffmann's titles are humorous; a grave kind of humour is apparent in Rumland's *Tierchen* series; humour features in Brandl's miniature stage that she constructed for her Faust/Beuys protagonist; and humour is an aspect of Radecki's *Burnt Poems* in her choice of adding Irmgard Keun to her explorations of censored authors' work (Radecki describes Keun as "*witzig*" – funny or humorous).

Eric Santner is not discussing humour in art, but he does give a very strong account of what happens emotionally to people who struggle with post-war ambivalence, perhaps especially in the absence of humour.

The postwar generations faced a situation in which one of the few strategies for emotional survival open to them was the assumption of a depressive position ... In those cases where the children did manage to break through the rigid silences of the parents, they often faced insuperable ambivalences that made the totemic viability of these parents highly problematic. And the third generation is no less implicated in this chain of negative dependencies. To return towards Shakespeare's emblematic mourner manqué, one might say that Hamlet's children too find themselves haunted by the ghosts of the past.⁷⁴

Through their art practice, rather than simply assuming a depressive position, the artists "break through the rigid silences" of their parents' generation. This allows them to face and appease ghosts of the past, and to acknowledge the existence of past crimes in an active rather than passive engagement with the past. The employment of a number of artistic devices, such as the use of humour in

⁷³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 91. I'm grateful to Jacqueline Larson who directed me to Bakhtin.

⁷⁴ Santner, 46.

approaching grave subject matter, allows both artist and audience to engage with, a haunting past in relative safety.

Childhood

The subject of childhood enters into the practice of all five artists. It features in their art practice in various ways: as biographical content derived from personal childhood experience, in themes pertaining to childhood in general, and in the integration of imagery or objects relating to childhood.

Probably one of the biggest challenges for the second generation is the psychic burden of their parents' unresolved feelings about the war. As Michael Schneider, an author quoted by Santner, has described it,

The post-war generation identified less with the [...] pathos of the reconstruction generation that they did with the latent emotions of that generation, i.e., with the concealed, unspoken, un-"lived-out" and apocryphal side of their sense of self. In a sort of unconscious displacement, the post-war generation appropriated those feelings of melancholy, resignation, and depression which the older generation, in an act of self-preservation, had denied itself, by repressing them through the heroic reconstruction effort.⁷⁵

Rather than a passive entanglement in a legacy of denial and repression – melancholy, resignation, and depression – the active involvement in an art practice opens the possibility of working through the feelings that the second generation of Germans appropriated from their parents during childhood. Approaching childhood in their art practice indicates a step towards that direction in the case of the artists I researched.

Brigitte Radecki's most recent series of paintings, *Burnt Poems*, illustrates a series of poems by Else Lasker-Schüler, which include a canvas that was inspired by a lullaby the author wrote for her son. Another of Radecki's canvasses that draws on childhood is *After Midnight* from the same series. It illustrates Irmgard Keun's

⁷⁵ Schneider qtd. in Santner, 37.

Die Reihendurchbrecherin, the story of a young girl who was trained to break through the lines of Hitler's admirers to hand the *Führer* a lilac bouquet because he loved to be photographed with children.

In the interview Suse Rumland recounted the impact that her father's stories had on her during childhood, and how they marked her life and art. This biographical material features prominently in most of her work, such as her towers, showers, boats, and the installation in *Emergency*. Rumland's *Tierchen* photos, composed of the little toy figurines that the artist collects, are the most obvious visual reference to childhood in her work. The *Tierchen* photos remind her audience of their own childhood, rather than limiting their meaning to the childhood of the artist alone.

In Eva Brandl's art practice, her childhood biography sometimes enters very directly, at other times more obscurely. In *The Golden Gates*, a link to Brandl's childhood experience of travelling by boat back and forth from Germany is apparent in the image of an ocean liner that is a focal point of this installation. Brandl describes the entry of the installation as an entry to an ideal place – which is what childhood is supposed to be, but in reality is not – just like *The Golden Gates*. In *Faust ou la Tentation du Possible* the artist refers to childhood by building a small theatre stage for a puppet.

The subject of childhood also frequently appears in my own art practice. Biographical content related to growing up in Germany enters into the majority of my works. Examples are the *Grim Reaper*, a series of painted copies of my early childhood drawings, and *Little Rascal*, which features a sound tape of my German childhood family. Childhood also features in the fairy tales and family anecdotes I use as a point of departure for such works as *Auschwitz* and *Baking Little Men*.

Bettina Hoffmann clarified in the interview that childhood is a major theme in many of her artworks pertaining to the subject of authority. Her pieces *The*

Hidden Smiles, *Pedagogical Toy*, and *The Emptied Dream* explore dangerous children's "games." *The Emptied Dream* is based on an old fairy tale, and projections of happy children contrast the clinical or institutional dormitory the artist has created in this piece.

In conjunction with the subject of childhood, the subject of boats feature prominently in the lives of two artists and the art practice of four artists. For example, as a child Brigitte Radecki emigrated from Germany by boat. As an adult she travelled by boat on an excursion with other artists to archaeological sites in England, which served as the inspiration for her installation *Sand Columns*. Eva Brandl emigrated from Germany to Canada twice by boat. In *The Golden Gates*, the ocean liner *Mauritania* is the focal point of the installation. Suse Rumland has dedicated an entire series to the subject of boats, which have numerous meanings for her, among them loneliness, and getting ahead. Her canvas *Exodus* alludes to the act of emigration. And in my own practice, boats are a frequent feature. For example, *Encore Anyone?* can be interpreted as a plea for cooperation in a post-Holocaust world. That is, "We are all in the same boat."

Language and Writing

Spoken language is acquired in childhood. With regards to the legacy of the Third Reich, certain aspects of the past appear unspeakable, while others might technically be spoken but still remain unsaid. The next two categories of similarities in the artists' work are language and the unspoken or hidden.

With regards to the inability of verbal language or spoken language to deal with the legacy of the Third Reich, Ernst Van Alphen recalls the words of Saul Friedlander, a historian who describes the difficulty of recording history when faced with the unspeakable.

The historian cannot work in any other way, and historical studies have to be pursued along the accepted lines. The events described are

what is unusual, not the historian's work. We have reached the limits of our means of expression. Others we do not possess.⁷⁶

In response to Friedlander's suggestion, Van Alphen poses the following question: "Could art and literature, rather than the discipline of history, provide the means to represent the unusual, unique incomparable nature of the Holocaust?"⁷⁷ Van Alphen's proposition for art to take on the role of a language that appropriately engages with the horrors of the Third Reich, is also suggested in a 1992 volume edited by Friedlander, *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution,"* in which historians such as Hayden White and Saul Friedlander argue that "for the Holocaust we need 'a new rhetorical mode'," and they look to literature and the other arts as possible options.⁷⁸

Without exception the artists are concerned with the subject of language and writing, in what appears to be a search for just such a new rhetorical mode with which to approach the unspeakable. Brigitte Radecki's *Reading between the Lines* and *Burnt Poems* are the direct result of the artist's long-standing experimentation with calligraphy and library research. They feature the copying of the actual handwriting of Third Reich authors. Radecki's ongoing concern with authors is another expression of her concern with language and writing. Suse Rumland's triptych *Writing* is a direct exploration of an alternative language: "These are efforts to speak, to write ... A language that could be understood by all, and in part one that does not exist at all." The statements that Rumland wrote on her studio wall, and which relate to the artist's double-bind relationship to Germany, give further indication of her ongoing concern with writing, and the creation of an

⁷⁶ Friedlander qtd. in Santner, 33.

⁷⁷ Van Alphen, *Caught by History*, 33.

⁷⁸ Saul Friedlander, ed. *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 33-34.

alternative language through art. Like Radecki and Rumland, Eva Brandl integrates text into many of her pieces, by writing onto her sculptural elements or including text directly on the walls of an installation. In fact, her complex installations may be viewed as statements in which each element contributes to the meaning of the entire text, in the way a word contributes to the meaning of a sentence. My own work, too, has always been an attempt to create a language to communicate what I cannot state verbally. An example of my explorations of alternate languages through which the unspeakable might be expressed is *A is for Auschwitz*, a visual alphabet based on the global inheritance of the Holocaust's continuing reverberations. Writing also enters my art practice through the storybooks that frequently accompany my exhibitions. They are meant to be taken home by the audience, in order to "infiltrate" their domestic space with Germany's past. The integration of text is also an important feature in the work of Bettina Hoffmann. Not only does she frequently integrate textual elements in her installations but language is also important – especially in the titles of her pieces, which often have more than one meaning and thus explore non-linear modes of interpretation.

According to Ernst Van Alphen, "the standard view has it that, within the symbolic domain, representations of the Holocaust are a case apart because of the inadequacy of mimetic symbolic language and because the historical reality to be represented is beyond comprehension."⁷⁹ The proponents of this argument believe that, due to the intrinsic limitations of language in this arena, it makes no sense to develop new forms of representations. However, I propose that the ongoing research by second-generation German artists into what Hayden White and Saul Friedlander call "a new rhetorical mode" at least opens up the possibility to engage the audience in a discussion of the subject that otherwise appears like a void in

⁷⁹ Van Alphen, *Caught by History*, 43.

spoken language. Without some way of gaining access to this material, we would be caught in what Van Alphen calls “the extreme horror of the historical reality [that] causes language to fall short.”⁸⁰ The artistic explorations of the five artists in my study allow for a negotiation of the shortcomings of language in inventing their own, based on personal experience and a wish to work through the residue of the past rather than a wish to retell history.

Hidden Secrets

The inability to approach the legacy of the Third Reich in spoken terms pertains to the next theme that all the artists include in their art practice – the subject of hidden secrets, which is a dimension of the unspoken. Not only were the Second World War, the Third Reich, and the Holocaust a restricted territory for first- and second-generation Germans – which unavoidably led to numerous unrevealed secrets about the Third Reich past of the first generation – but the denial and repression that were the staples of the first generation’s survival practice led to further hidden secrets. It is these hidden secrets that may be attributed to the artists’ curiosity about the past, which is apparent in their art practice. In the words of Brigitte Radecki: “I always wanted to know, to know without knowing how and why and what.” When asked whether this need to know may be viewed, in effect, as the typical obsession experienced by victims of trauma to expose oneself repetitively to what has traumatized you, she replied “exactly.”

Eric Santner claims in *Stranded Objects* that the working through of the foundations of National Socialism has still not been achieved:

Even those in their twenties today [second-generation individuals in their thirties now], whose parents passed along their own defenses

⁸⁰ Van Alphen, 43.

against the past, continue to live in the shadow of the denial and repression of events that cannot be undone by acts of forgetting.⁸¹

Rather than concentrating on acts of forgetting, the artists I worked with are engaged in personal acts of remembering details of that past from a variety of angles, which becomes apparent in their frequent involvement with the subject of hidden secrets in their art practice.

Brigitte Radecki's title *Reading between the Lines* hints at the possibility that secret knowledge may be hidden in between the lines. During her interview she asked, "What do you read when you read between the lines? Do you get the truth, then? Do you get more of the truth, if you read between the lines, than if you read it straightforward?" Radecki also hides "secrets" on her canvasses in layering processes and the application of medium that is invisible unless the canvas is viewed in a certain light.

In the work of Eva Brandl, secrets slowly become revealed to the viewer in the lengthy discovery process of her complex environments. Brandl's use of a "portal" in *The Golden Gates* and a curtain in *Model for a Temple of Reason* leads to the separation of parts of the installation from the rest of the work. Upon entering, what is initially hidden becomes revealed to the audience. The general level of ambiguity of Brandl's pieces further links them to secrets to be uncovered. And her recurrent interest in Faust is a further reference to the desire and possible danger involved in discovering secrets and gaining knowledge. Faust trades his soul and ultimately his life to the devil in order to discover the secrets of the universe. Metaphorically speaking, Brandl still appears to be searching for that Second World War "hole" she knew of in the garden of her grandparents.

In Suse Rumland's work, it is her process rather than her subject matter that suggests hidden secrets. By layering her paintings she is constantly covering up or

⁸¹ Santner, *Stranded Objects*, 34.

hiding certain parts of a work, while uncovering others with scratching and erasing techniques. The process enables Rumland to search for hidden knowledge and truth about Germany's past. And as they are for the other artists, in my own art practice, hidden secrets are also an ongoing theme. Not only are actual secrets often hidden on the painted sides of my canvasses, but the trompe l'oeil doors of my canvasses allude to hidden secrets behind them.

In the paintings *To Dear Mother* and *Baking Little Men* the cupboard doors stand slightly ajar, making the viewer curious about the secrets they may contain. The viewer also experiences the frustration that is felt when our attempts to uncover a secret fail. The general subject matter of these paintings suggests that those secrets pertain to the legacy of Nazi Germany. In *Don't you see that everything's in perfect order?* a number of elements become apparent to the viewer only under close scrutiny of the painting, because I have purposely made their discovery difficult. Examples are a garbage bag that resembles the head of the central figure, as well as a leaf behind the window that, upon closer inspection, looks something like the ear of a wolf. Some of my paintings were even effective in revealing hidden secrets to me, such as the piece of paper that reads *Ezra* or "help" in *Don't you see that everything's in perfect order?* and the actual meaning of *Baking Little Men*, which I became aware of only after having finished the canvas. In the series *Still Alive*s I purposely hid swastikas, in order to "undermine Germany from without." Not all viewers are aware of them, but subliminally the shapes are visible to all. In the case of *The Grim Reaper*, the entire work process that I designed for the construction of the series was aimed at my wish to uncover secrets from my childhood past, a process that attempted to reconnect me to a preverbal state by copying my early drawings as life-sized replicas. Bettina Hoffmann's most direct reference to hidden secrets is apparent in her work called *The Hidden Smiles*, in

which the smiles of the mannequin heads in the installation attempt to cover up Germany's Third Reich past. Hoffmann explains:

For me the title "The Hidden Smiles" means: there is something that is not talked about, and we simply smile in response, playing along although this is not a nice game...Or it could be that you want to hide some part of the story, or even history – let's say that of Germany: you don't want to talk about it. But the "hidden" can still break through in that smile, it remains, is still present.

This notion of the hidden breaking through into consciousness seems to be a way to break through the way that, as Ernst Van Alphen argues, "the Holocaust has short-circuited communication." He quotes Dutch artist Armando – one of Van Alphen's research subjects – in his effort to illuminate how an artistic practice that attempts to approach the legacy of Nazi Germany, and particularly the Holocaust, might be engaged in a different process than spoken language and its unsuccessful attempts in appropriately dealing with the subject:

Little by little I began to understand that one should not write or paint the things one knows. One should write or paint that which hides itself between knowing and understanding. A little mark, a wink is possible, a suspicion, no more, and that is already a lot.⁸²

It is in their exploration of hidden secrets that the artists I researched approach "that which hides itself between knowing and understanding." Their concern with the hidden secrets of Germany's past is linked to their exploration of the subject of time.

Time

The artists' concern with time and its passage surfaces on numerous occasions, particularly in conjunction with an archaeological approach. It appears to be a particularly appropriate concern for second-generation German artists, whose

⁸² Van Alphen, *Caught by History*, 176-77.

lives in the present have collapsed into the lives of their parents' generation. In

Stranded Objects Eric Santner says about the second generation of Germans that:

The children of both persecutor and persecuted felt called upon to repair the fatal events in the histories of their parents. Since they were burdened with a task stemming from a past reality that was incomprehensible to them they could only act out what had been engraved, but not integrated, in their parents' memories. Thus, a second reality was actualized in the present reality of these children, but they had no insight into its points of reference.⁸³

Santner refers here to people who are not necessarily practising artists. But the five artists I've come to know, rather than simply acting out "what had been engraved," are actively involved in a practice that may allow them insight into the points of reference of that "second reality." Their ongoing concern with the subject of time is evidence of a search for these points of reference, which are located in a past that they did not live.

In its archaeological approach, Brigitte Radecki's *Sand Columns* is clearly concerned with the theme of time and its passage. In *Sand Columns* the audience encounters a piece which at first appears to stem from the past, but which the artist intentionally gives away as a construct from the present. The passing of time is also alluded to by the sand running onto the museum's floor. Brigitte Radecki's *Sand Columns* is effectively giving the "past a place." Radecki's work on author Else Lasker-Schüler and other censored writers of the Nazi era shows another approach to time. By copying the author's handwriting and by inserting the author into a contemporary painting practice, Radecki collapses the boundaries of time in an attempt to give the dead author both a presence and a place in the present. The aspect of time is particularly apparent in the labour-intensive processes the artist purposely employs, which generally lend an obsessive quality to her work. Time is

⁸³ Santner, *Stranded Objects*, 36.

also a necessary element for the audience in the exploration of Radecki's multi-layered paintings and in the viewing of *Sand Columns*.

The issue of time features prominently both in the lives and in the art practice of all the artists I studied. Common to most artists in their personal lives is an inability to experience time in a linear fashion. This becomes evident in the interviews of Kessin, Brandl, Radecki, and Rumland. Suse Rumland, for example, has difficulties relating to time as we are usually meant to experience it in our daily lives. But this curious aspect of not being able to relate to aspects of time "normally" is not a phenomenon experienced by Rumland alone. She explains:

I always have problems with planning ahead, and planning altogether. That might have to do with that double history. I don't even know how old our cat is, although the cat was born here. I would have to count and look at old photos. To plan ahead, that is extremely difficult for me. To plan my own life... but I am not the only one with this history who has this problem, it is a phenomenon in the "Two-Worlds" group, the others are aware of the same difficulties.

Concepts of time differ in the lives of individuals who feel that the past has collapsed into their present. In the work of Suse Rumland, time as a subject features in many of her works that deal with her obsession with the past: her shower series is concerned with the history of concentration camps, and the tower works are an attempt to build life-designs for herself on the rubble left by the Third Reich. Rumland's boat painting entitled *Exodus* illustrates the demise of the German-Jewish population in the Nazi era, despite the fact that Rumland herself is a living "remnant" of that group. In terms of her work processes, time features there too because Rumland's work involves a labour-intensive method of layering, painting, and un-painting – it is a complex process of discovery rather than simply filling a canvas with a preconceived image. Time is also in the foreground of Rumland's installation in *Emergency*, in which the artist collapsed past and present in a re-enactment of the Theresienstadt concentration camp. In her *Tierchen* photos, Rumland again attempts to bring times past into a present context. As a collector of

the small figurines, she “gathers” the past and assembles it for her audience – both in order to contemplate the past but also to connect it to pertinent issues in the present.

A lot of time is required both in the construction and the viewing of Eva Brandl’s multifaceted and ambiguous sculptural installations. Elements connected to the artist’s childhood biography and the history of Germany in general challenge the viewer to consider the past in a contemporary context. The passing of time is also made literal in the oxidization processes integrated in the installation *Model for a Temple of Reason*. In *Model for a Temple of Reason*, time and its passing may be regarded as the major theme of the installation, since the piece centres on the process of transformation itself, which is directly related to time’s passage. Like Radecki, Brandl is very conscious of the labour-intensive aspect of her installations.

In my own work, a time- and labour-intensive process is similarly consciously integrated in the painting of my canvasses. It ensures that everything I paint is of major importance to me. I may spend up to several months on a single canvas, and would not commit to this amount of time and labour if the painting were not essential. With regards to my painting process, I purposely use very small brushes. Thus I require a lengthy amount of time in the painting of a piece. I also work with numerous layers. Some of my large works feature up to ten layers of intricate brushwork in order to obtain the depth and detail I aim for. Particularly in those works where Third Reich subject matter enters, spending a major amount of time on the work is my way of acknowledging that this history can be approached only with an intense level of involvement. This commitment is related to my feeling that there are dues to be paid for debts incurred by Nazi Germany. My painted works also demand a lot of viewing time from the viewer, because there is a lot to discover in the numerous, hidden “secrets.” I often collapse several time periods into one painting. For example, *Don’t you see that everything’s in perfect order?*

portrays a woman who is a construct of three generations of German women, collapsing the past into the present. In the case of *The Grim Reaper*, the entire painting process was constructed as a "time-travelling device." In repainting my childhood images, I attempted to uncover a past that was pre-verbal and thus inaccessible to me as an adult. I then integrated adult historical knowledge into the small companion pieces by superimposing Photoshop text onto the laminated copies of my actual childhood drawings. Again I thus collapsed the past into the present, in an effort to approach and work through traumatic childhood experience.

As I explained to Loren Lerner:

I took images that looked really happy, but to me had a sinister undertone. I wanted to see not only if it would enable me to travel back to a time I had lost access to on the conscious level – almost like an unravelling of history – but also: in the act of doing it now, would it have its own impetus? Because you don't just unravel history, at the same time you are changing something. By changing something, everything else falls apart as well. And they did have that effect... I unbottled childhood demons that I had not even known existed. I saw that until then I had misread my own childhood images and was only able to access them through my adult painterly practice.

The painting series *Still Alive*s is an attempt to recreate a past gone missing through its combination of objects (which are the remains of an era that I did not experience). Again, I did not simply attempt to represent that past but to bring it into a contemporary context. The inclusion of familiar objects and scenes allowed the audience to connect their own experiences to mine.

In the work of Bettina Hoffmann, a collapsing of the past into the present becomes apparent in her ongoing encounters of the Third Reich past in her installation practice, in which she does not recreate the past but places it into contemporary contexts by linking them to subjects of childhood socialization and its destructive effects in the present. The fact that Hoffmann's installations were carried out in Berlin indicates that the artist picked up on the actual remnants of a past that lingers on in that particular city, one of the key sites of power for the Third Reich. As some of Hoffmann's encounters with that past were unintentional,

it indicates that, as a Berlin artist, it may be impossible to escape the past, particularly in an installation practice that unfolds in buildings which are the visible reminders of that past.

Labour of Mourning

In *Stranded Objects*, Eric Santner explores Germany's post-war efforts to work through the legacies of fascism and the Holocaust. He says that the present stage starts with the dying out of the perpetrator generation, and he places the second generation in a situation of having to approach the Third Reich legacy. According to Santner, in this stage the fundamental issue becomes what it means to identify oneself as a German while Germany still finds itself under the shadow of the "Final Solution." Santner argues that the task of integrating damage, loss, disorientation, and decentredness into a transformed structure of identity is one of the central tasks of *Trauerarbeit*, or "labour of mourning," which the second generation of Germans now faces.⁸⁴

The art practice of the second-generation German visual artists I studied involves an active labour of mourning. The fact that they are individuals of German background involved in an art practice increases the possibility that they will be engaged in an active labour of mourning, rather than a passive acceptance or repression of the legacy passed on to them by their parents' generation. In the case of four of the five artists, the fact that they are not living in Germany contributes to a lessening of a cumulative impact of traumatic residue that artists in Germany might be exposed to, circumventing a greater level of reticence to explore issues about Germany's past. This was the case in my own experience of showing my work in Germany. Being involved in an art practice – which facilitates explorations of

⁸⁴ Santner, xiii.

traumatic residue that cannot be verbalized – and distance from Germany both establish a safe place that permits an active labour of mourning.

Eric Santner points out that in order to relinquish something (i.e., the legacy of the Third Reich) a labour of mourning is required, and that mourning requires a space in which its procedures can unfold.⁸⁵ The artists I studied have not only created such a space for themselves, but through the public exhibition of their work they contribute towards the creation of a “mourning space” for their audience as well. Within their practice, there are numerous approaches that specifically connect their processes to a labour of mourning. Particularly significant is the fact that, in general, the artists are purposely involved in extremely labour-intensive processes: the extensive amounts of time spent on the construction of some of their pieces related to German history, in conjunction with the built-in strategies that necessitate extensive viewing time for the audience, establish environments in which the labour of mourning can unfold.

In Brigitte Radecki's *Sand Columns*, for example, the tedious, painstaking aspect of her work was a premeditated and necessary element of the piece. Being able to put together and dismantle the piece on her own further appears to give the artist a sense of control. Once again in *Reading Between the Lines*, the intricate and labour-intensive small brush-work was a premeditated and necessary process in spending the amount of time with the subject that its graveness demanded from the artist. In my own work the extensive time I spend on a given work specifically allows for a space and time to spend in “mourning,” or in contemplation of the subject. The amount of time and energy spent is further connected to a wish to “pay dues,” and pay homage. Whether it's through a complex layering processes and small brush-work in painting, or the construction of elaborate large-scale

⁸⁵ Santner, 151.

environments, these artists are conscious of time's passage and value. My discussion of each artist also includes works that are conceptually involved with the past collapsing into the present. These works constitute a sincere effort to "work through the past," and may even contribute to what Santner has called the reconstitution of a German self-identity in the wake of the catastrophic turns of recent German history.⁸⁶

According to Eric Santner, the task of mourning involves the labour of "recollecting the stranded objects of a cultural inheritance fragmented and poisoned by an unspeakable horror."⁸⁷ The "collection of stranded objects" is another motif evident in many of the artists' work, both in their actual employment of objects from the past – such as Rumland's *Tierchen* and my *Still Alive*s – but also in their ongoing, if underlying, concerns with Germany's past and its "objects." The mere production of artifacts that return a lost or hidden past to life contributes to the preservation of that memory in the present and for the future. It is a practice that may ultimately be teaching us a new way of thinking.

Santner indicates how this may be achieved by reminding us of Walter Benjamin's notion that "thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes into a monad."⁸⁸ The production of an artifact that houses aspects of a lost, repressed, fading, and distorted past, an artistic practice that is not a realistic rendering of historical accounts of that past, may be viewed as an effort to "blast" specific moments and situations out of Germany's past. In their attempts to focus on their

⁸⁶ Santner, xiii and 151.

⁸⁷ Santner, xiii.

⁸⁸ Walter Benjamin qtd. in Santner, 152.

own stories and experiences in their art practice, the artists I studied are successfully blasting or extricating themselves from the charge of that history.

Giving the Past a Place

In *Caught by History*, Ernst Van Alphen recalls how, as a youth in post-war Europe, he had the memory of the Second World War and the Holocaust “drummed into [his] mind,” and how that history failed to have the required effect: “I was bored to death by all the stories and images of that war, which were held out to me ‘officially’ as moral warnings.”⁸⁹

Although the education Van Alphen received failed to make the horrors of the Third Reich meaningful for him, art succeeded in calling his attention to this apocalyptic moment in human history: “It is remarkable that it was imaginative representations of the Holocaust that hooked me.” Van Alphen points out, however, that, as soon as Holocaust art or literature introduces narrative elements that relate to historical “reality,” post-Holocaust culture has its guard up: “Narrative imaginative images or texts are considered to be in violation of a strict taboo.”⁹⁰ I agree with Van Alphen that, in order to approach such a past, art is in a privileged position to engage the audience in a way that historical renditions cannot. I also agree with Eric Santner, that (in terms of my project) it is the second generation in particular that may be successful in the production of a “new rhetorical mode” with regards to the Third Reich legacy. As actual representations of Third Reich horror, however, art is acceptable to our post-Holocaust culture only in the form of witness accounts. Unfortunately, this format merely establishes the former existence of a past moment. But oblique encounters with the past, especially those that produce a

⁸⁹ Van Alphen, *Caught by History*, 1.

⁹⁰ Van Alphen, 3, 4.

"Holocaust effect" without necessarily having the Third Reich as a subject, are successful in what Van Alphen calls "giving it a place," both in our memory and as actual artifacts of a personal, rather than historical nature. Examples of such works in the artists I studied are Bettina Hoffmann's shower installations, her installation *Caught*, and her sculptural piece *Pedagogical Toy*. Other examples are my sound installation *The Little Rascal*, Suse Rumland's *Tierchen* photos, Eva Brandl's *Model for a Temple of Reason*, and Brigitte Radecki's *Reading Between the Lines*.

Ernst Van Alphen's concept of "giving the past a place" is an extension of the concept of the labour of mourning for which, in the words of Santner, a place or space is needed in which the "elegiac processes of mourning can unfold."⁹¹ Van Alphen's book *Caught by History* discusses why and how a re-enactment of the Holocaust in art can be successful in simultaneously presenting, analyzing, and working through an apocalyptic moment in human history. In his study of contemporary German filmmakers, Van Alphen attempts to show how re-enactment, as an artistic project, also functions as a critical strategy which, unlike historical methods requiring a mediator, speaks directly to the audience and lures us into the past of Nazi Germany. The audience is thus placed in the position of experiencing and being the subjects of that history. The artists I have researched are frequently involved in an artistic practice that develops strategies that encourage or "lure" their audience into their work. I have outlined a number of these practices in the sections on similarities about archaeological, architectural, and theatrical approaches. They include Bettina Hoffmann's implication of the audience as witness or bystander in the social settings she creates in her installations, Suse Rumland's re-enactment of the Theresienstadt concentration camp in *Emergency*, and my painterly devices which visually let the audience "fall"

⁹¹ Santner, 151.

into a piece that is void of a protagonist. This strategy is successful in “giving the past a place,” rather than attempting to represent and thus creating a safe viewing distance from which an audience can contemplate a distant past.

In *Caught by History*, Ernst Van Alphen points out how the artist Armando has purposely exiled himself in order to displace himself in space, “so as to keep alive his bewilderment about the past, to give it a place in the present in a very literal way.”⁹² It appears that there is a similar productive displacement for all the artists I researched (in the case of Radecki, Brandl, Kessin, and Hoffmann an actual displacement in space; in the case of Rumland her remaining in Germany despite the fact that she sees herself as a displaced minority in her native country); this displacement contributes to the success of their efforts to give the past a place through their art practice. Van Alphen elaborates on “the importance of being not-at-home” in remaining conscious about one’s origins and their impact on wherever one finds oneself: “transformation is caused by the special need that occurs in this state: the artist in exile is forced to relate to phenomena outside herself or himself.”⁹³

In their continuous state as outsiders – and all the artists relate to that ongoing experience in the interviews – the artists are looking at the history of Germany from more than one perspective. In fact, they are living in a situation that is akin to a “Holocaust-effect.” They are also in a position to look at themselves from more than one perspective. It is a position that has the potential of developing that “space for empathy” called for by Eric Santner,⁹⁴ that is necessary in order to

⁹² Van Alphen, 14.

⁹³ Van Alphen, 18.

⁹⁴ Santner, 7.

become involved in an actual process of mourning, rather than remaining in a state of depression and melancholy as a response to the legacy of the Third Reich.

Lending the Dead a Voice

My concept of “lending the dead a voice” is yet another aspect of the labour of mourning. It is a necessary process in order to locate untold or unspeakable elements in the legacy of the Third Reich, and to give them voice through an art practice that places emphasis on the communicative properties of art making. Each artist I studied works to lend the dead a voice through using their own art practice as a vocabulary that fills a void (such efforts in constructing alternate languages have been highlighted in the section entitled “Language”).

When I was a child, my father, a Second World War veteran, used to sing a song to me and my siblings, which I have translated into English here:

Klotz, Klotz, Klotz am Bein,
Wie lang ist die Chaussee, he?
Links zwei Bäume, rechts zwei Bäume,
In der Mitte Zwischenräume.
Klotz, Klotz, Klotz am Bein,
Wie lang ist die Chaussee?

Klotz, Klotz, Klotz am Bein,
Wie lang ist die Chaussee, he?
Links Gespenster, rechts Gespenster,
In der Mitte ein paar Fenster.
Klotz, Klotz, Klotz am Bein,
Wie lang ist die Chaussee?

Ball and chain, ball and chain,
How long is the *chaussée* [road], hey?
Two trees left, two trees right,
Spaces in between.
Ball and chain, ball and chain,
How long is the *chaussée*?

Ball and chain, ball and chain,
How long is the *chaussée*, hey?
Ghosts to the left, ghosts to the right,
Windows in between.
Ball and chain, ball and chain,
How long is the *chaussée*?

The song illustrates how the legacy of the Third Reich continues to burden second-generation Germans. As a child I was taken by the sombre monotony of the song, which sounded more like the recital of a poem than an actual song. At the time I was unaware that it was a marching tune for soldiers, likely from the Second World War, when my father was conscripted. The song appears too disrespectful to have been an official marching tune. It deeply impressed me by the “ghosts” it evoked. As a child I did not know who the ghosts were, and did not ask. I believe that I feared the answer, yet always wondered whose ghosts they might be. Not knowing their identity made them loom even larger in my childhood imagination.

As an adult, and in the context of second-generation German art, I understand what the song’s lyrics mean for me. The ball and chain are a metaphor for the legacy of Nazi Germany, which follows the descendants of Third Reich Germans wherever they go. The *chaussée* is a road into the unknown that has to be travelled by those who wish to discover the missing links and untold truths of Germany’s Third Reich past. The ghosts are those who have lost voice, yet insist on being heard by the travellers on the road. The voiceless ghosts encourage us to explore alternate languages, so that whatever has rendered them – and us – speechless may be communicated.

Second-generation German visual artists “lend voice” to the ghosts of the past, and circumvent the speechless territory of the Second World War, the Third Reich, and particularly the Holocaust through their art practice. Although there are countless voices still to be heard, they don’t hold the promise to reveal any one truth or master narrative. Rather, they allow us to approach the various facets and secrets of the past in order to render them visible to a larger community. Those who listen and lend their voice may encounter themselves along the way, finding their way “home,” rather than ending up lost.

The song's "windows in between" are the openings or spaces "in between" historical truth. They are Brigitte Radecki's "reading in between the lines" and "never wishing to be purely in one medium," and Suse Rumland's "windows that allow a look to the inside." They are windows of opportunity that permit glimpses of a reality that is not representational in the traditional sense. The windows are the openings and passageways of my painting *To lend the dead a voice*, inviting us to look into forbidden spaces and trespass onto unknown territory. None of us can know "How long is the *chaussée*, but as we travel, we are working to free ourselves of our ball and chain by telling stories for those who can no longer speak.

CONCLUSION

Speechless: Second-Generation German Perpetrator

For my conclusion I have translated a song by the German punk-rock band called *Nichts* (Nothing) from the 1980s. It illustrates the general dilemma experienced by the second generation of Germans:

Ich sing ein deutsches Lied

Deutsch sein, niemandem sagen,
Nur Angst vor Fragen,
Scham für mein Land.
Ich sing ein deutsches Lied,
Ich sing ein deutsches Lied,
Und will es keiner hörn,
Ich sing ein deutsches Lied.

Stolz sein ist mir verboten,
Bin hier geboren,
Mich trifft keine Schuld.
Ich sing ein deutsches Lied,
Ich sing ein deutsches Lied,
Und will es keiner hörn,
Ich sing ein deutsches Lied.

I sing a German song

Being German:
Never tell!
Fear of questions,
Shame for my country.
I sing a German song,
I sing a German song,
And if no one wants to listen,
I sing a German song.

Pride is
Clearly forbidden,
I simply was born here,
Carry no guilt.
I sing a German song,
I sing a German song,
And if no one wants to listen,
I sing a German song.

The *Gnade der späten Geburt* (the mercy of late birth, a dubious mercy if any) clearly separates the second generation of Germans from the so-called “perpetrator” generation. Yet, as the song states, many members of the second generation still feel compelled to hide their German background; they fear disturbing questions they are unprepared to answer about Germany’s Third Reich legacy, and even fear being attacked personally in their integrity as human beings because of their country’s violent history and the unresolved aftermath of the Nazi regime.

The song is illustrative of the “split personality” that marks the second generation of Germans, which is entangled in a legacy of guilt, despite the fact that up to twenty-five years separate them from Nazi Germany. Although the second generation of Germans knows rationally that they are not guilty of past deeds, many feel the shame that stems from simply being born in Germany: “Shame for my country.” Without the ability to identify with one’s country, however, and without the experience of comfort or even pride in belonging, one’s identity is often made up of conflict and ambivalence.

The song’s line “I simply was born here” highlights the fact that no one chooses their place of birth. Yet the environment and historical moment into which we are born affiliate us with our nation’s history, and this is particularly so in the case of Germany. This problem of reconciling one’s own context with a national history is confirmed by Suse Rumland, who feels that she is “stuck” in Germany, despite the fact that she does not clearly identify herself as German. The song’s refrain “And if no one wants to listen, I sing a German song,” is an act of defiance as well as an expression of the need to be heard. It illustrates the fact that the second generation, in opposition to the first generation of Germans, is actively looking for opportunities to address the legacy of Nazi Germany, even “if no one wants to listen.”

It is not surprising that this song was played on popular radio and became a hit with German youth in the 1980s (i.e., those born between 1960 and 1970, at the tail-end of the second generation, which became more daring in speaking out about their conflicted inheritance). Too young to be considered guilty of having committed actual war crimes, they are still deeply marked by the Third Reich through their personal experience of its after effects. Raised in post-war environments, they not only inherited the repressed trauma of their parents but were themselves traumatized in numerous ways (lost relatives, economic hardships, dysfunctional parents, or missing parents, etc.). They are thus the last generation touched by the Third Reich, the Second World War, and the Holocaust on a greater personal level.

Although recent studies have substantiated that repressed first-generation trauma does affect the third generation of Germans – both Gentile and Jewish – this generation never experienced the absolute taboo zone surrounding discussion of the Third Reich that was imposed upon the second generation. As the reticence about the subject diminishes, and as the first generation is dying out, the second generation may well be the last generation that might have the opportunity to engage in a Third Reich discourse with the necessary emotional closeness, while also having the distance required in order to not become entirely entangled in the traumatic residue of that past.

The “schizophrenic” state of the second generation of Germans pairs the longing for pride with the experience of shame, the wish to “come out” as Germans with wanting to hide one’s nationality, and the need to confront and discuss the legacy of Nazi Germany with the fear of discomforting questions and other painful reverberations. In “singing a German song,” second-generation German visual artists address the void and contradiction they experienced in growing up.

As I have indicated in this project, it is the second generation of Germans, and its artists in particular, that can search for missing links to a ruptured past. Whether it is through poetry, literature, music, or visual art forms, they are formulating a vocabulary that engages with what had rendered us speechless. In this thesis I have established that such a group of second-generation German visual artists does exist. However, because of the necessarily small number of case studies, the project can contribute to only a small piece of what remains a large puzzle.

My contribution to the larger picture suggests the possibility of additional areas of research. A large-scale, quantitative investigation would have the potential to distinctly address the various sub-categories of second-generation German visual artists, including artists living in Germany, of Gentile parentage only, of mixed heritage, and of Jewish parentage only. Other categories to be addressed specifically are second-generation German visual artists living in diaspora, and again: of Gentile parentage only, of mixed heritage, and of Jewish parentage only. Further categories to be considered are artists born in diaspora or having emigrated from Germany, and born in Germany or having emigrated to diaspora.

An additional benefit of a large-scale investigation would be the possibility to distinguish between the three decades in which second-generation German visual artists were born. This would supply additional information on how the phenomenon of their art practice might be changing over time. Although I do not plan to develop a quantitative study, I am, however, intrigued by the possibility of interviewing further second-generation German artists in Germany in the future, in order to obtain a better idea of how the phenomena I researched is manifested in my native country. I am further interested to extend my research to a small group of case studies of third-generation German visual artists, both in Canada and in Germany, in a narrative and qualitative vein similar to the way in which I conducted this project.

My research to date has refrained from considering the third generation of German visual artists, although I did interview one Berlin artist who was born in 1971. This artist belongs to the youngest possible members of the third generation, according to the parameters I set for my thesis. This interview gave me a preliminary indication how visual encounters with the legacy of the Third Reich might be changing from the second to third generations of Germans. From my present and rather limited perspective, it appears that the second generation's personally invested, initially oblique encounters with the past of the Third Reich become more direct and generalized in the artwork of the third generation of German visual artists. Researching the third generation might further confirm my proposal that the artistic voice of the second generation is in a particularly advantageous position to address the rupture in Germany's history that was the result of the Second World War, the Third Reich, and the Holocaust.

From childhood, the Second World War and the Holocaust were a daily presence for me. As a small child I felt guilty and worthless being German. As an adult I came to the conclusion that, although I cannot speak of personal guilt (the German word is *Schuld*), I am faced with an incredible debt load (the German word is *Schulden*) that Germany incurred in the past and still hasn't paid. I believe that it must be Germans, like myself, who will have to decrease this debt, by engaging themselves politically, whether as artists or otherwise.⁹⁵

Rather than being a burden alone, there are advantages to being a second-generation German – and particularly an artist, as it allows an active engagement in a long-overdue "labour of mourning." Such an engagement empowers the artist with agency, keeping us from becoming helplessly entangled in

⁹⁵ Katja Kessin, "A is for Auschwitz and Art after Adorno," in Loren Lerner, ed. *Afterimage: Evocations of the Holocaust in Contemporary Canadian Arts and Literature* (Montreal: Institute for Canadian Jewish Studies, 2002) 77.

a legacy we cannot escape, while establishing a larger community with which to share the work. As one of Ursula Hegi's interview subjects, a second-generation German and a psychologist, describes her own generational position:

At this stage of my life I'm understanding and tolerating the complexity [of the Third Reich legacy]. I don't have to make it simple. That's true of how I feel about being German. It's a very complex thing, and it's okay that it's that complicated. In fact, it's the complexity that makes it a real gift. I don't wish it away. I don't wish it out of my life. If you'd asked me at age fourteen, I would have wished it away.⁹⁶

Although I did not anticipate that "tolerating the complexity" of Germany's legacy in my own life would be a result of my five-year involvement in this project, living with ambivalence does seem like a form of achieved wisdom, especially since the thesis did not fulfil its promise of personal closure. The Second World War, the Third Reich, and the Holocaust infiltrated my life from an early age and cannot be separated from my personal life experience as "something that happened before I was born." My intense engagement with the subject matter, however, had me commit a substantial amount of time in an active and productive attempt to approach the Third Reich past of my native country. Although closure does not appear to be a possibility, even on the personal level, my intense involvement with the subject matter resulted in the establishment of community and the refinement of an art practice which, from its earliest projects, attempted to make sense of an incomprehensible past. Despite having written a thesis on the subject, it is only my recent artwork that most adequately addresses the complexities that surround Germany's Third Reich history. I consider the artistic ventures that paralleled my research my most appropriate contributions in opening up the discourse on the Second World War, the Third Reich, and the Holocaust, in that they are much more complex than anything I could ever put down in words. This confirms to me that,

⁹⁶ Hegi, Ursula. *Tearing the Silence: On Being German in America* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 285.

where words render us speechless, art may be the most appropriate vehicle with which to circumvent reticence, denial, and the easy truths formulated by popular history, in order to approach that which we cannot put into language otherwise.

As my final statement I will therefore describe the last piece of art I made for my doctoral thesis exhibition, *Speechless*, the piece called *Second Generation Perpetrator* (fig. 8.1). I vertically mounted and framed three enlargements of my baptism photo on a black background. The work measures 43 x 87 cm. The individual photos, measuring 23 x 31 cm each, are placed at a slight distance from one another, giving the viewer the impression of looking at a strip of film negatives. The first of the three black-and-white photos shows the enlarged original, permitting the audience a bird's eye view into a baby basket. The basket is elaborately adorned with frills and white cushions. A bouquet of flowers has been placed over the baby's hands. The baby – me at nine months old – has just been baptized in the Christian faith and is now sleeping. The fact that the child's eyes are closed, as well as the elaborate decoration of the basket and the addition of the flowers, leave the viewer under the impression that the photo might have been taken on the occasion of the child's funeral.

The second mounted image shows a close-up of the first image, concentrating on the face of the sleeping child alone. The third image zooms in closer yet, cutting in and enlarging a section of the baby's face and concentrating on her features – eyes, nose, and mouth alone – lending the image a surreal quality. What becomes apparent to the viewer in examining the second and third image on the "film-strip" is that a feature has been added to the original photograph in all three images, which is not so apparent in the first image because of its smaller size: a miniature, red swastika has been placed on the forehead of the baby, on a location where practitioners of yoga locate the "third eye": between and slightly above the eyes. In the second enlargement the swastika becomes much more

visible, and in the third and last image it looms threateningly on the forehead of the sleeping child. Like Cain, her forehead has been marked for terrible past deeds, in order for future generations to be warned.

FIGURES

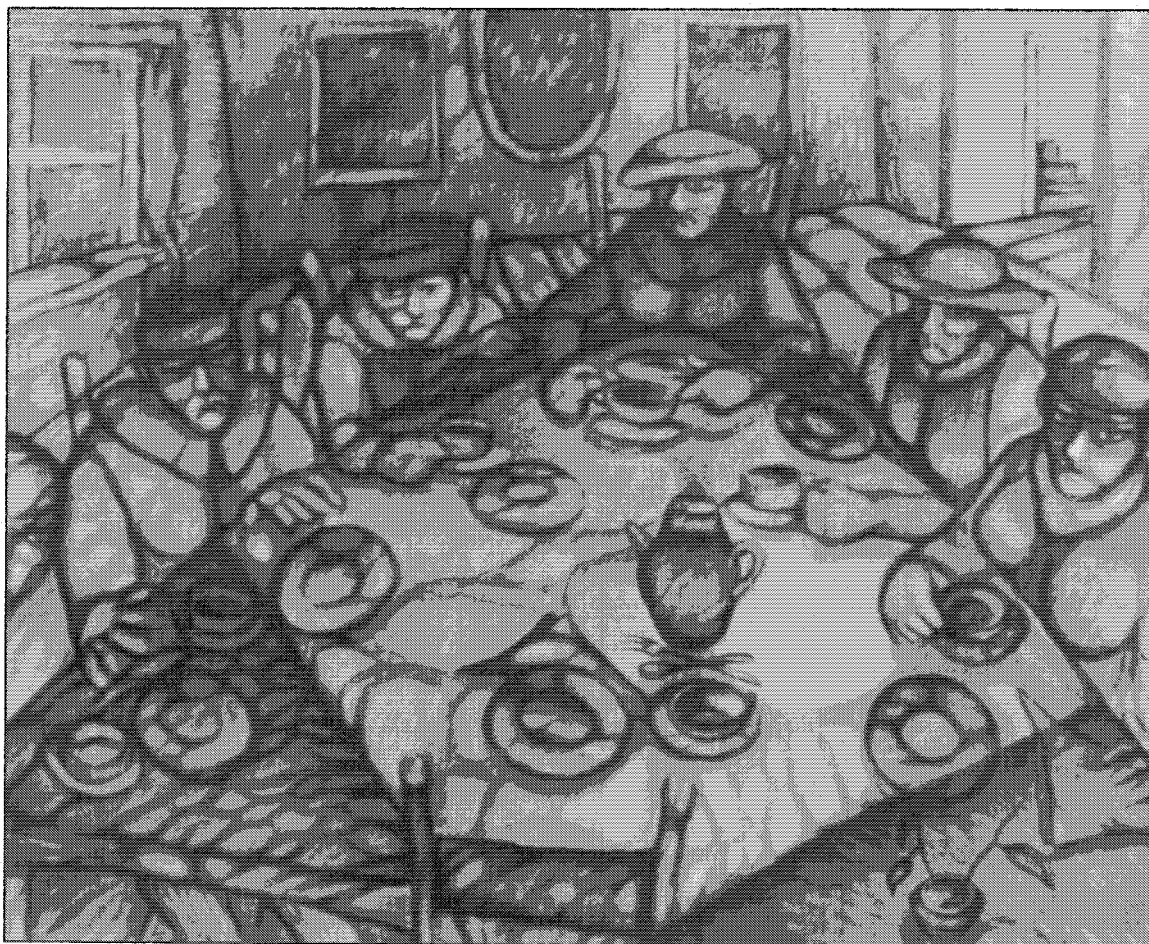


Figure 1.1: Katja Kessin, *To Lend the Dead a Voice*, 1988.
(acrylic on canvas, 4'10" x 4')

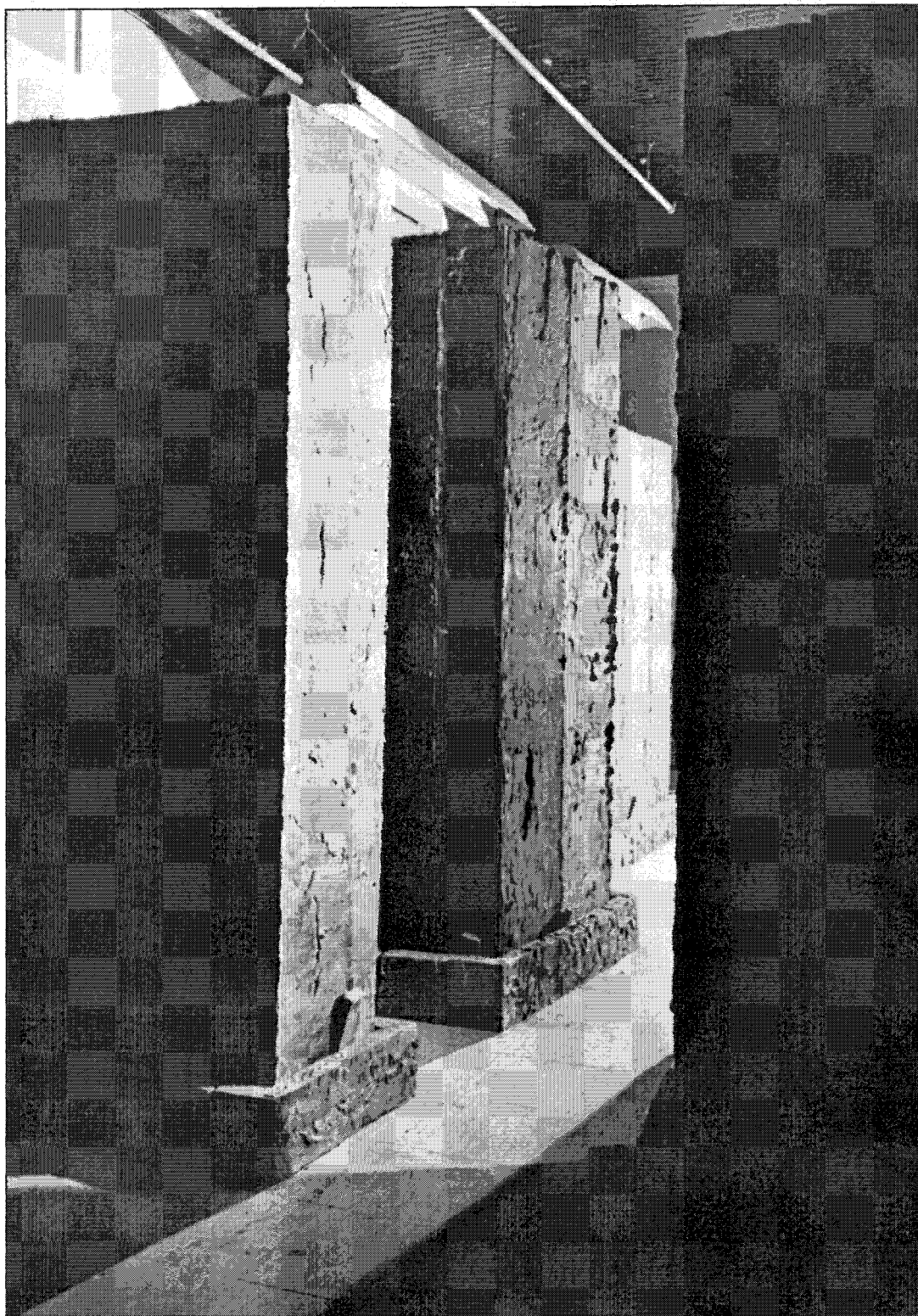


Figure 2.1: Brigitte Radecki, *Sand Columns*, 1983. (installation detail)

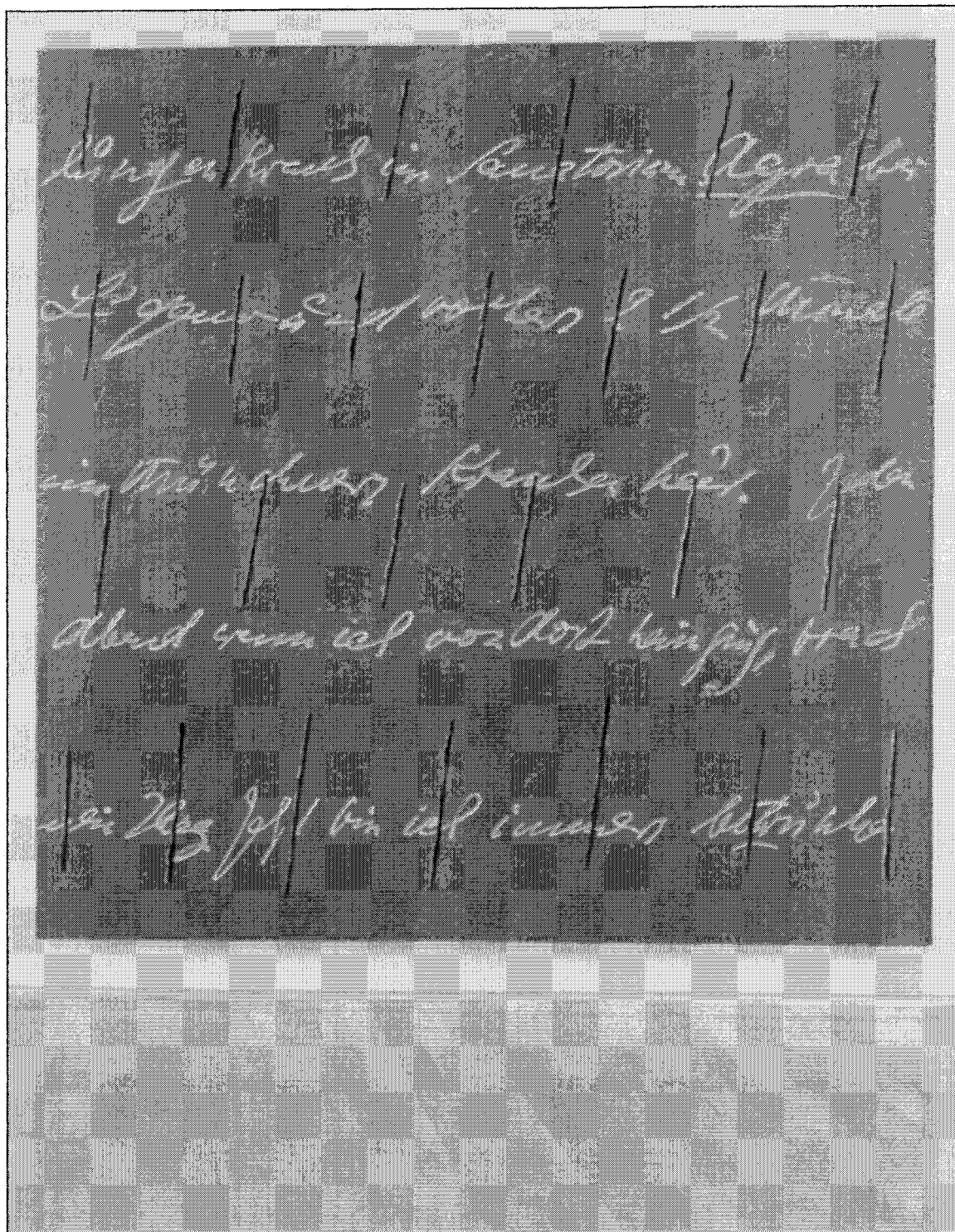


Figure 2.2: Brigitte Radecki, *Sanatorium Agra*, 1998.
(detail of mixed media installation *Reading Between the Lines*)

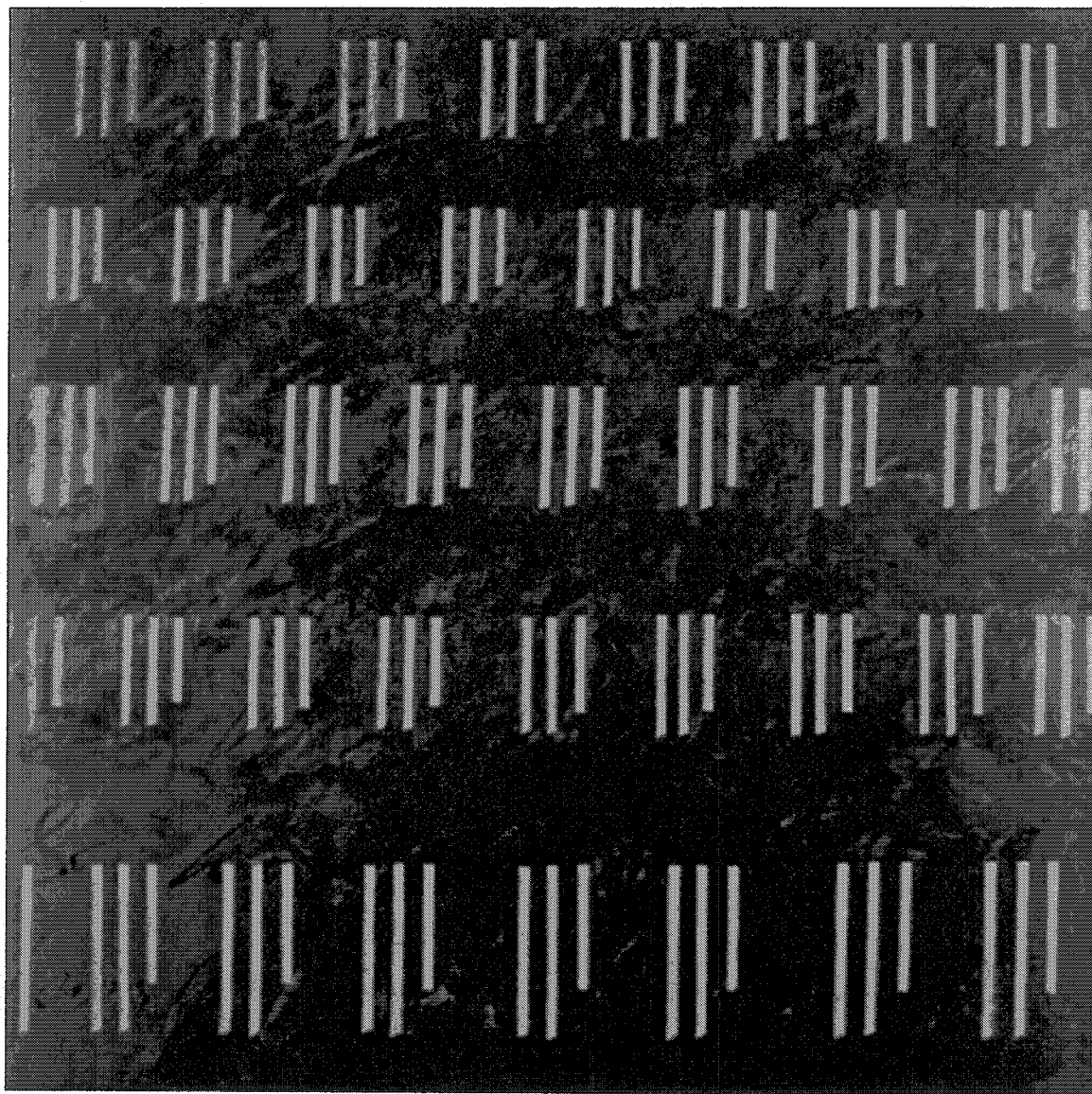


Figure 2.3: Brigitte Radecki, *My Blue Piano*, 2000. (acrylic on canvas, 8' x 8')

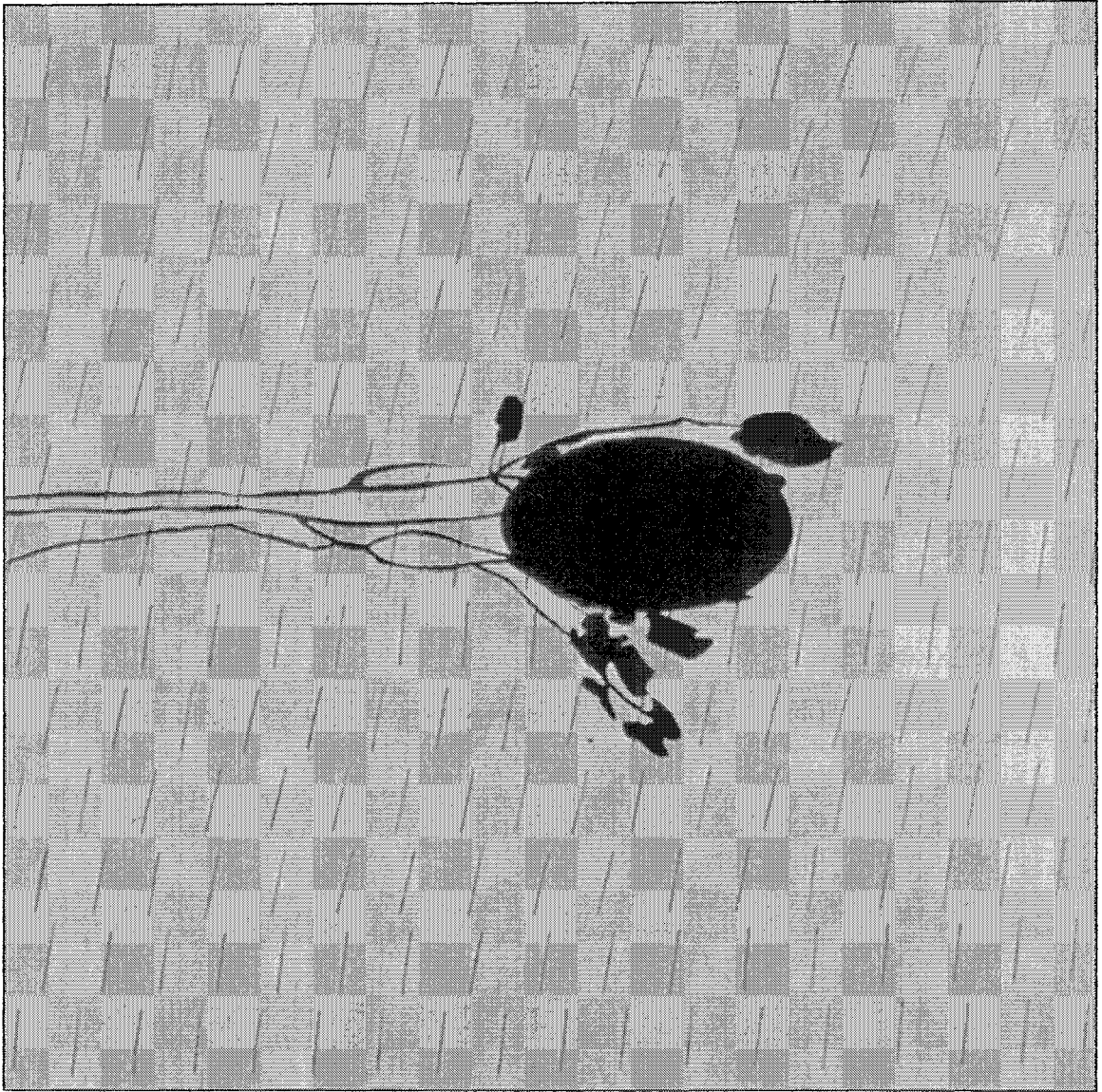


Figure 2.4: Brigitte Radecki, *After Midnight*, 2001. (acrylic on canvas, 8' x 8')

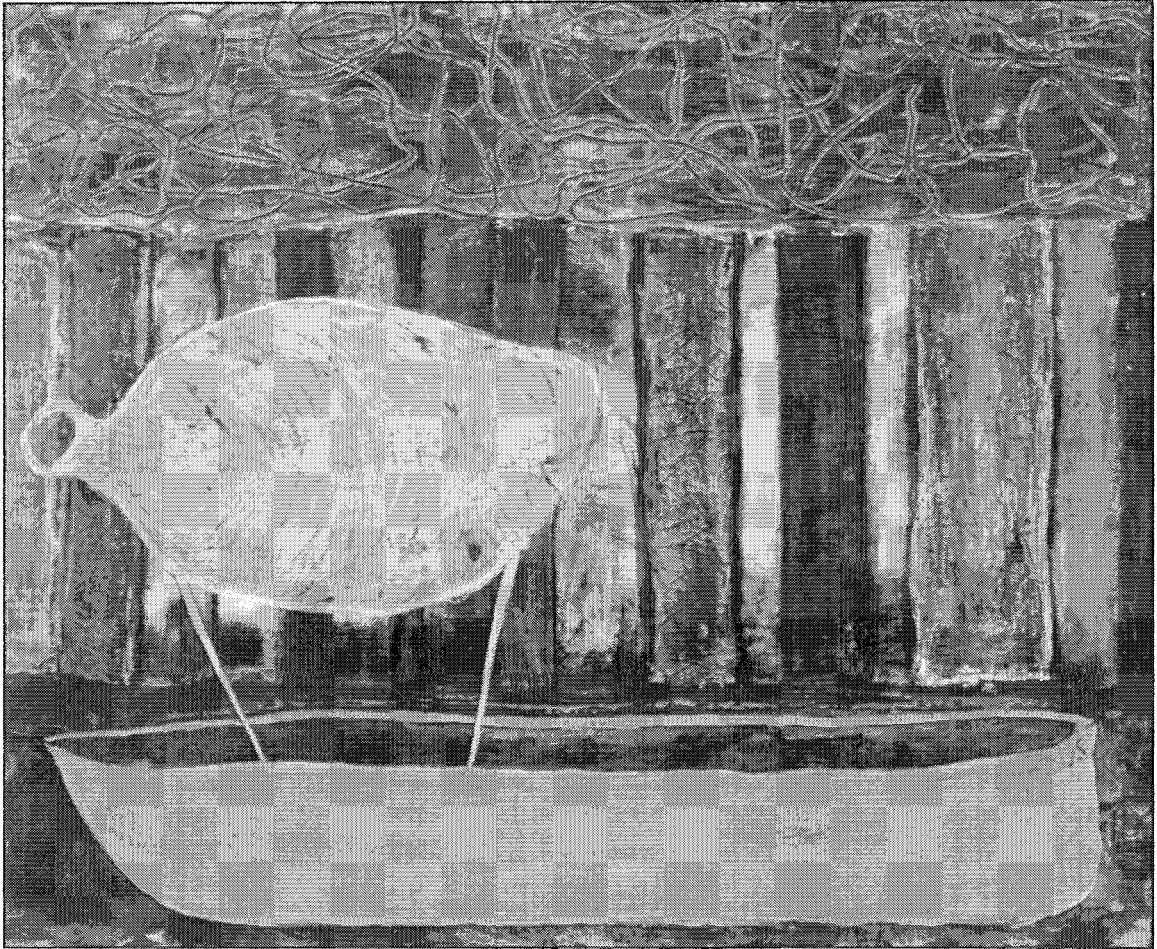


Figure 3.1: Suse Rumland, *Exodus*, 1998. (acrylic on linen, 3.6' x 2.9')

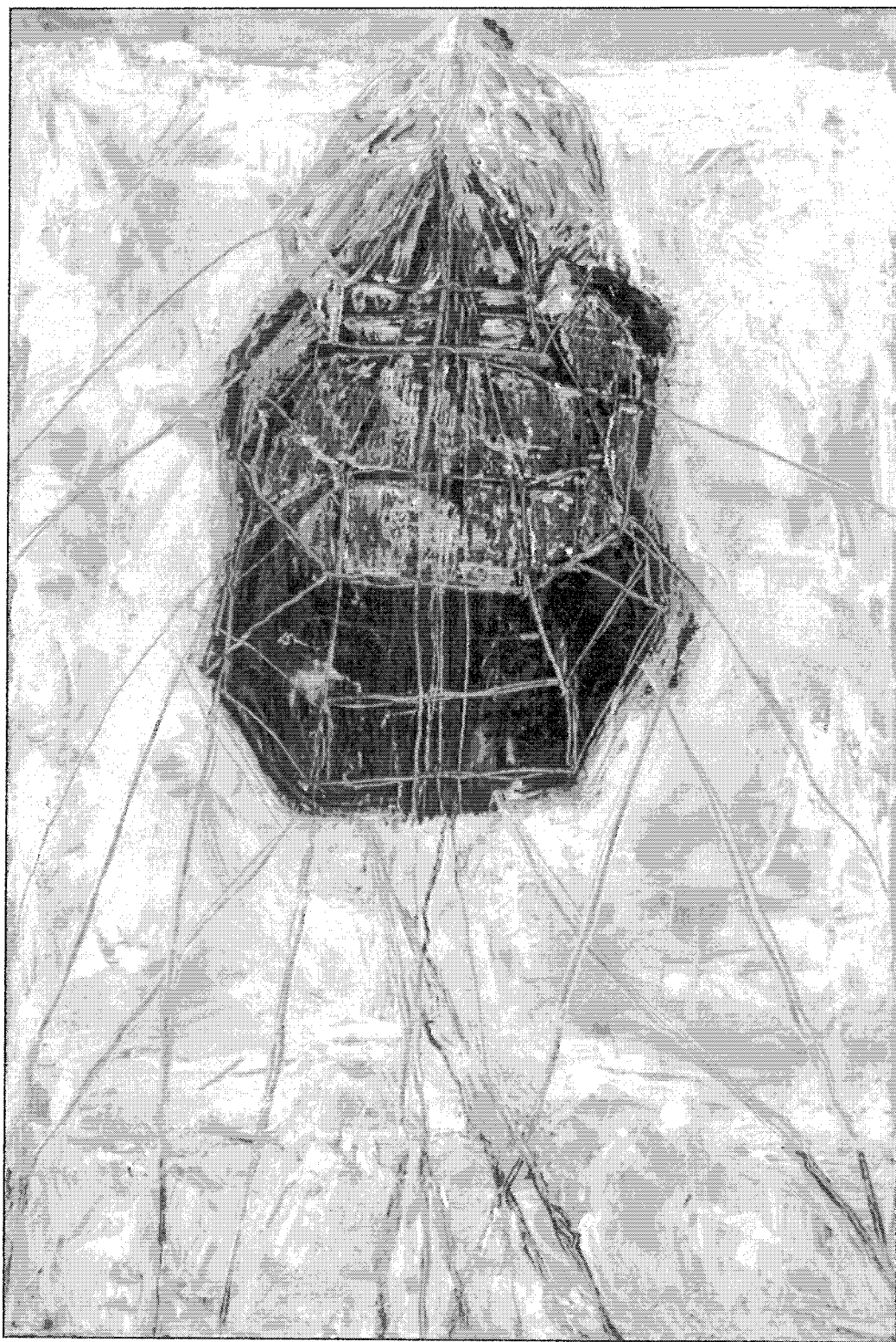


Figure 3.2: Suse Rumland, *Tower*, 1997. (oil on linen, 1.3' x 2')

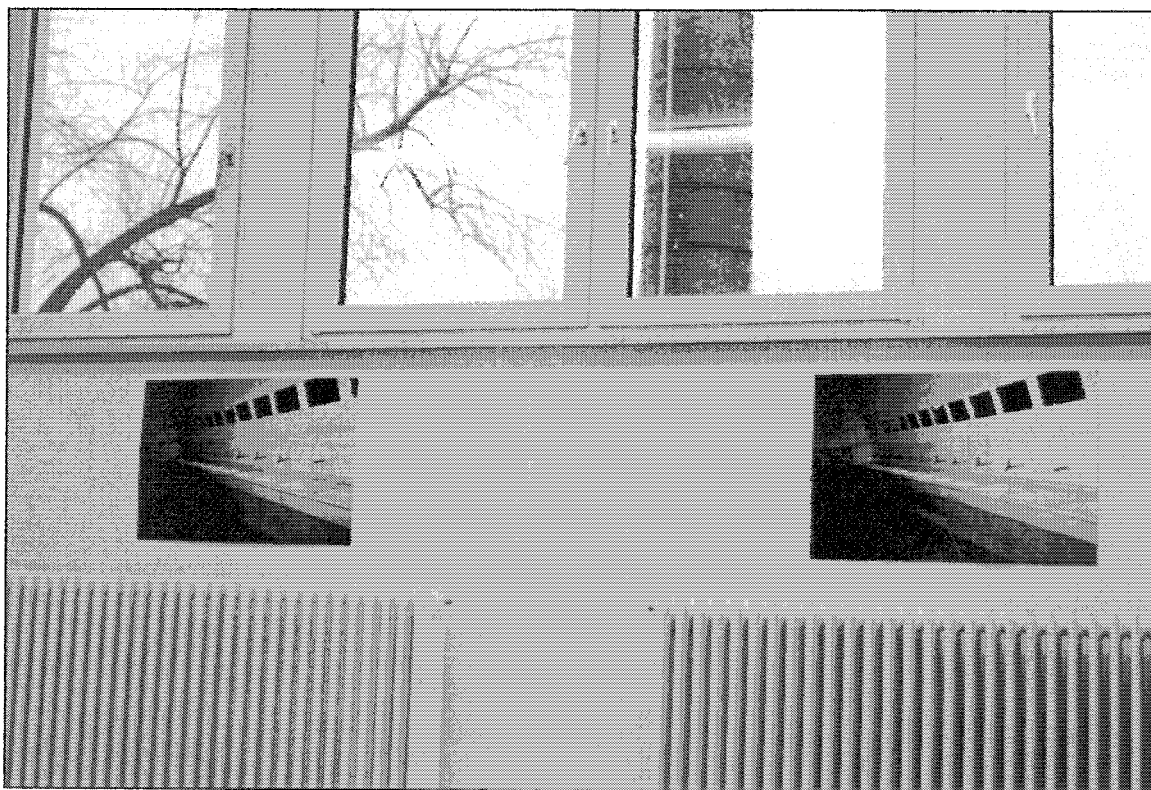


Figure 3.3: Suse Rumland, *Emergency*, 1999. (installation detail)

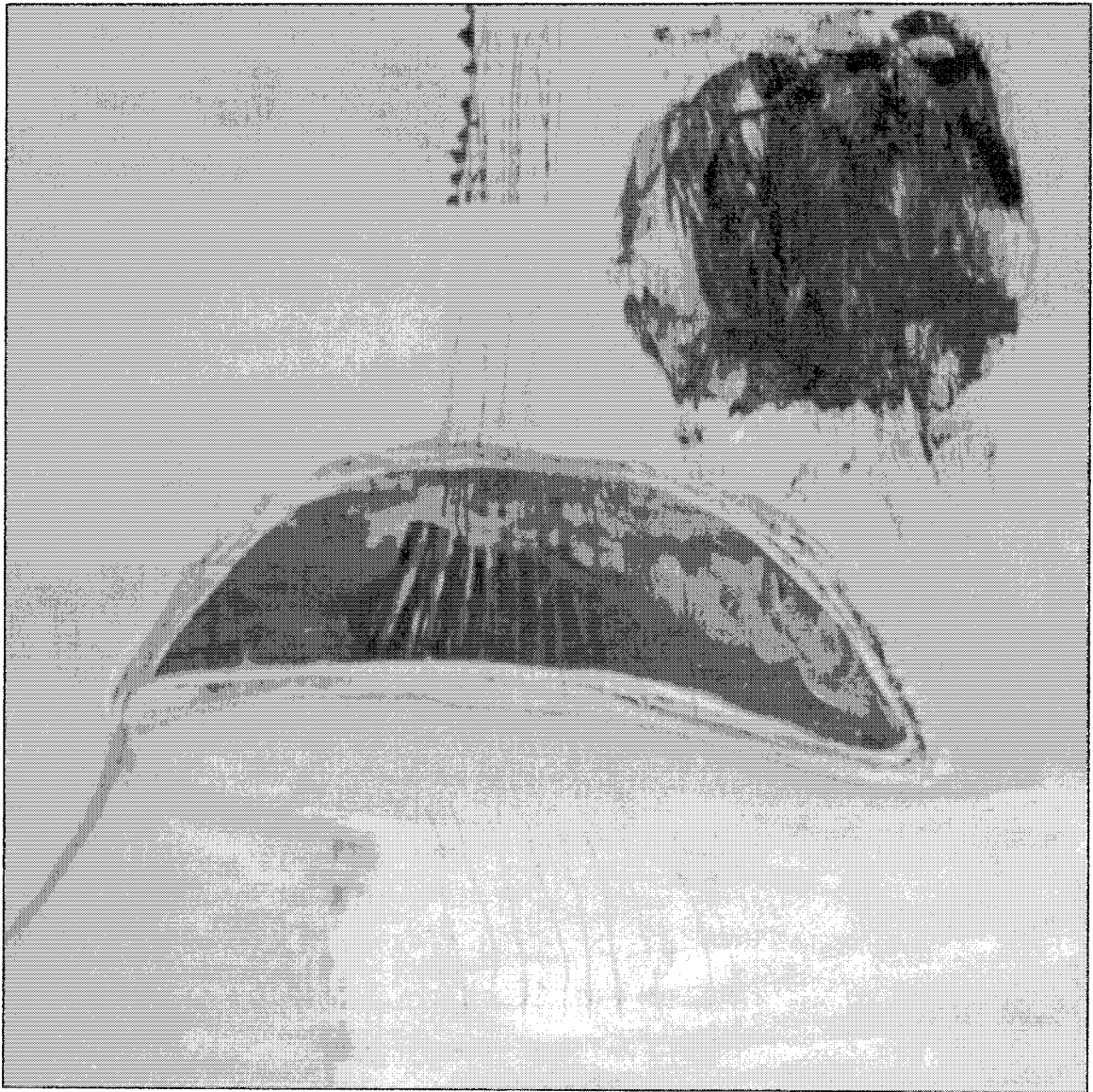


Figure 3.4: Suse Rumland, *Shower*, 2000. (oil on linen, 4.3' x 4.3')



Figure 3.5: Suse Rumland, *Two German boys* (Tierchen series), 1990s – ongoing.
(photograph, 5" x 7")



Figure 3.6: Suse Rumland, *Mother Rabbit* (Tierchen series), 1990s – ongoing.
(photograph, 5" x 7")



Figure 3.7: Suse Rumland, *German girl & Troll* (Tierchen series), 1990s – ongoing. (photograph, 5" x 7")

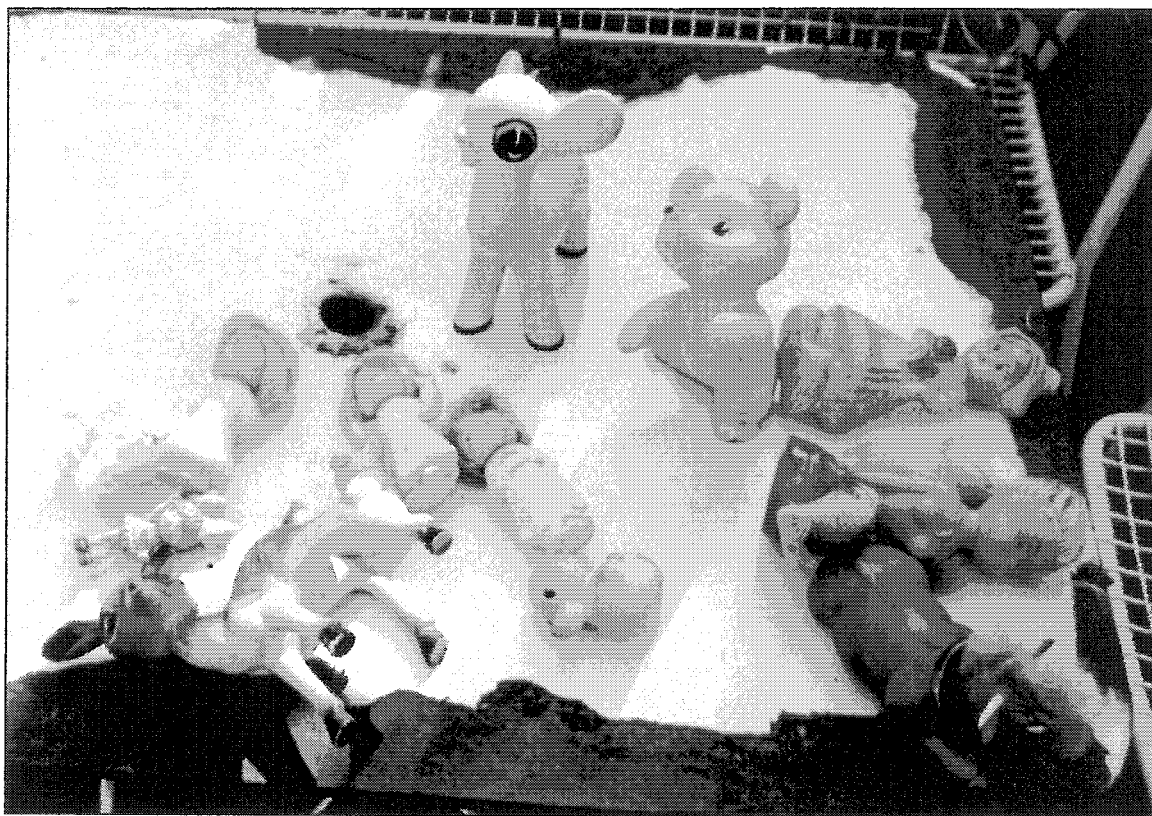


Figure 3.8: Suse Rumland, *Crime scene* (Tierchen series), 1990s – ongoing.
(photograph, 7" x 5")

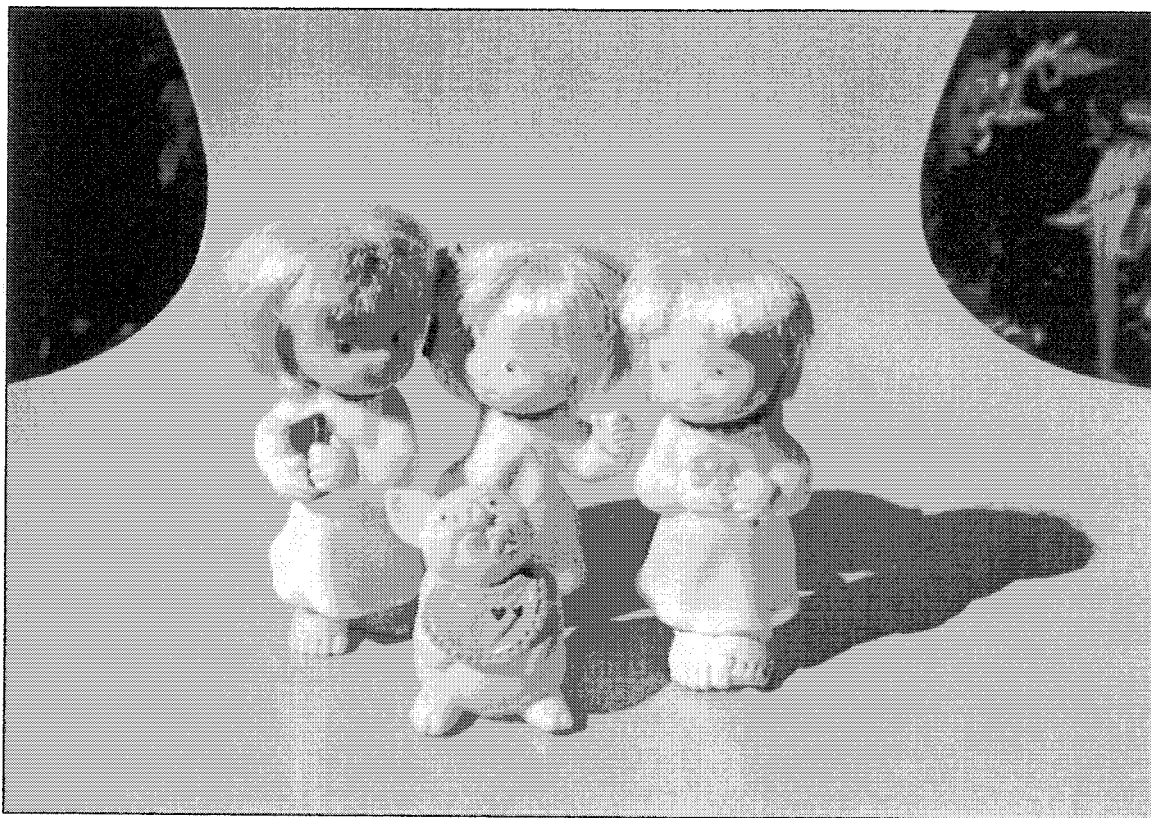


Figure 3.9: Suse Rumland, *Three weird angels* (*Tierchen* series), 1990s – ongoing.
(photograph, 7" x 5")

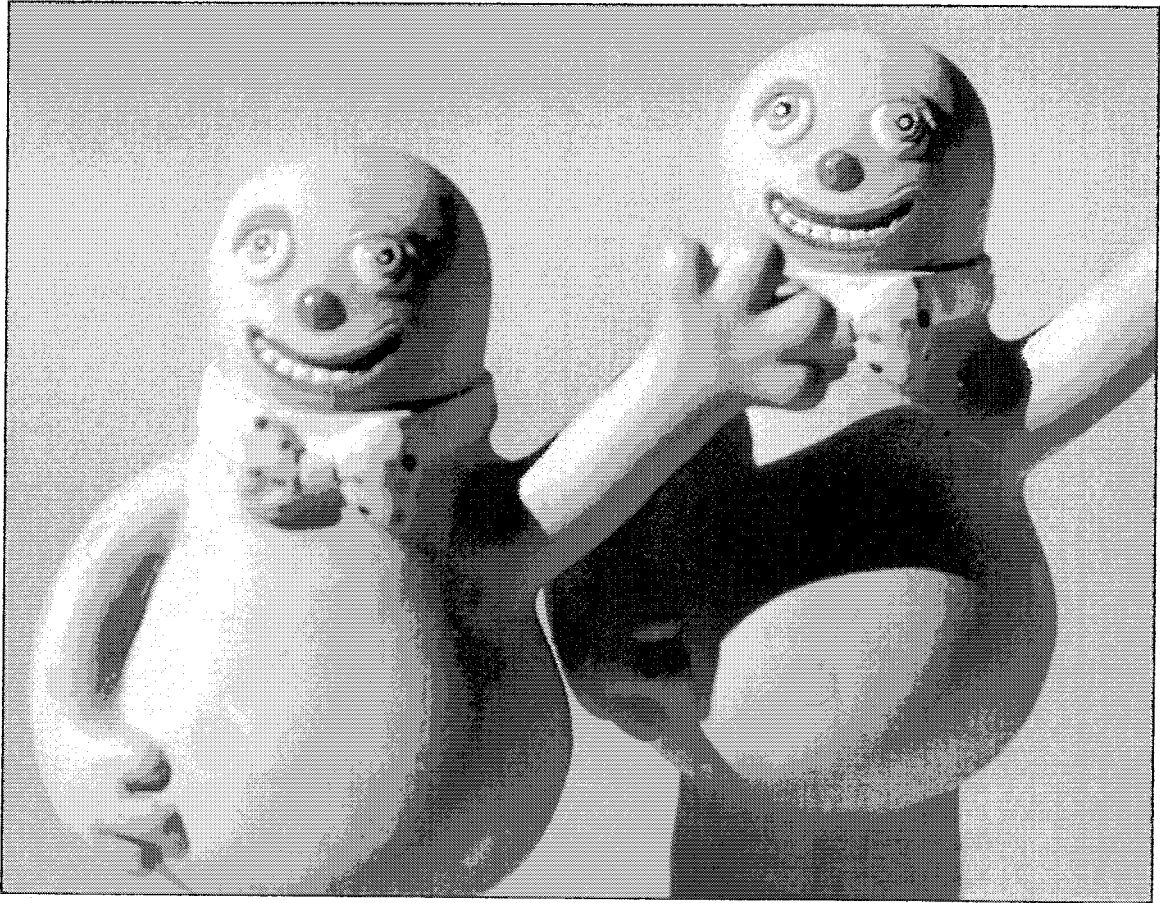


Figure 3.10: Suse Rumland, *Heil!* (*Tierchen* series, detail), 1990s – ongoing.
(detail of photograph, 7" x 5")

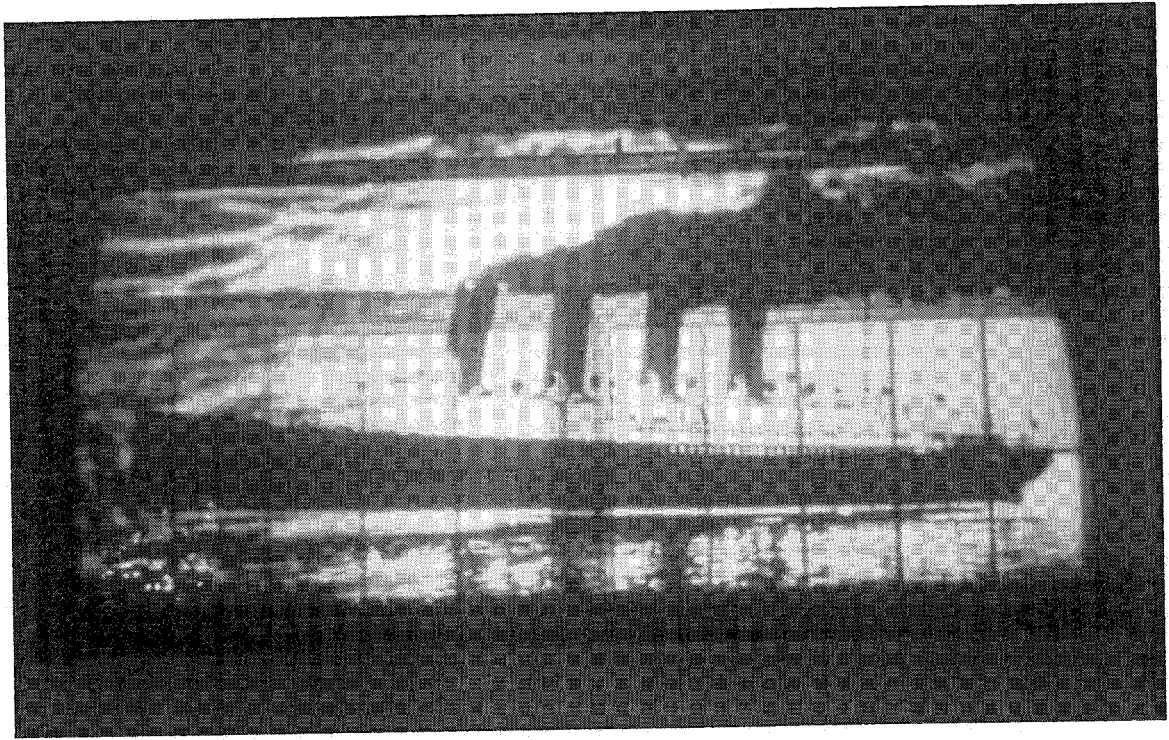


Figure 4.1: Eva Brandl, *The Golden Gates*, 1984. (installation detail)

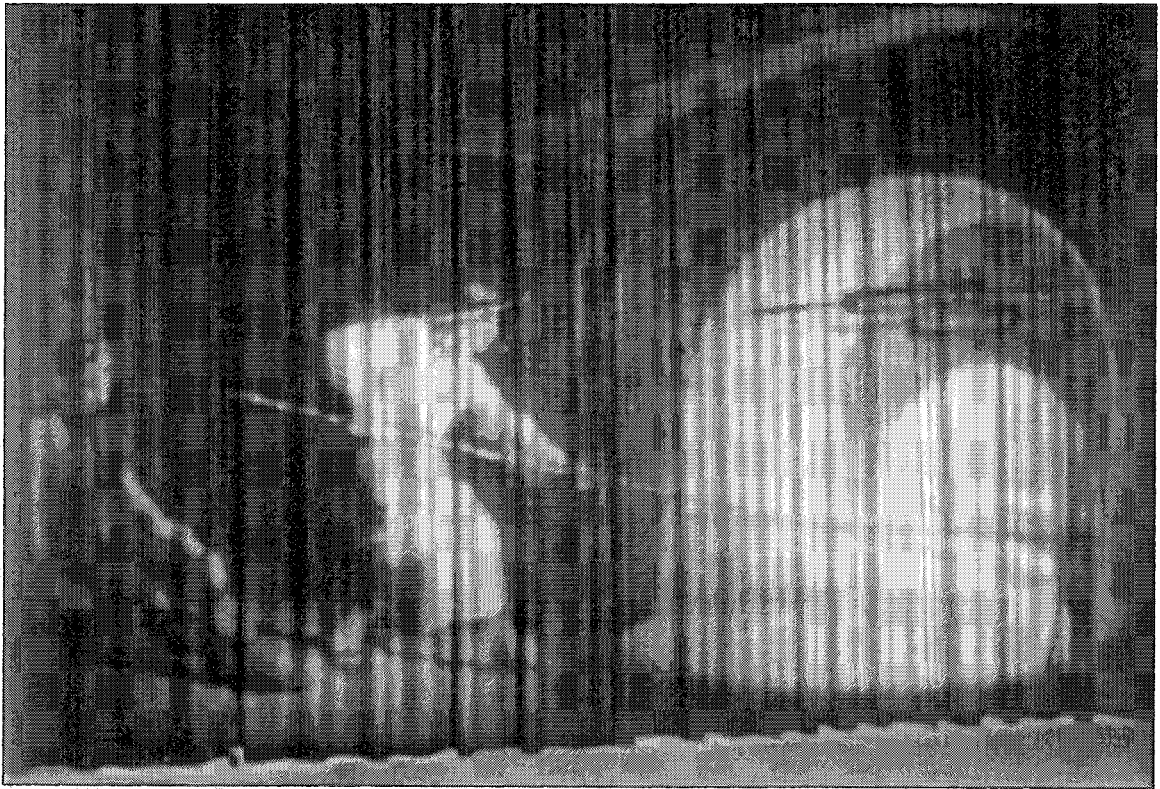


Figure 4.2: Eva Brandl, *Model for a Temple of Reason*, Part I, 1987.
(installation detail)

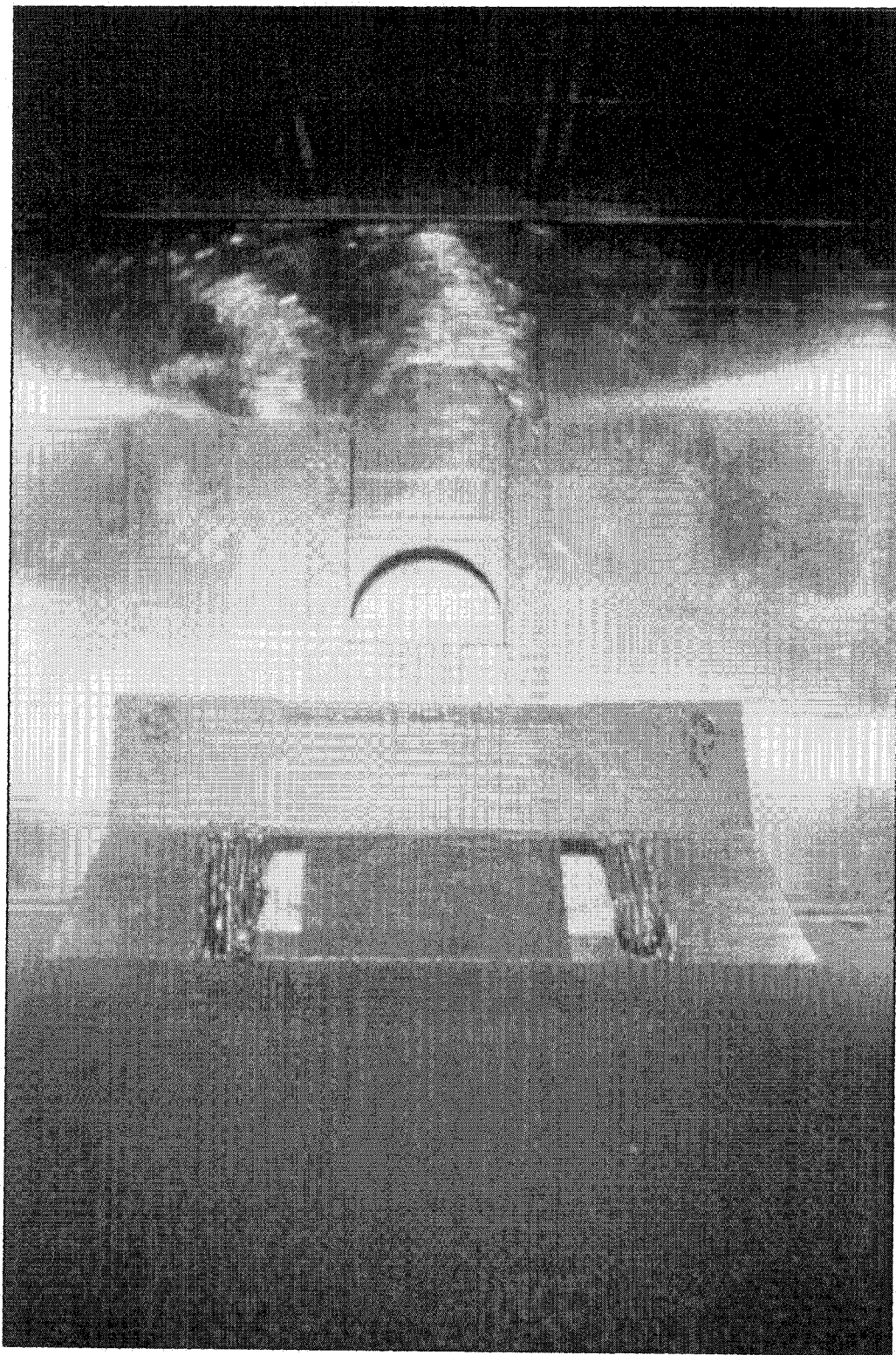


Figure 4.3: Eva Brandl, *Model for a Temple of Reason*, Part II, 1987.
(installation detail)

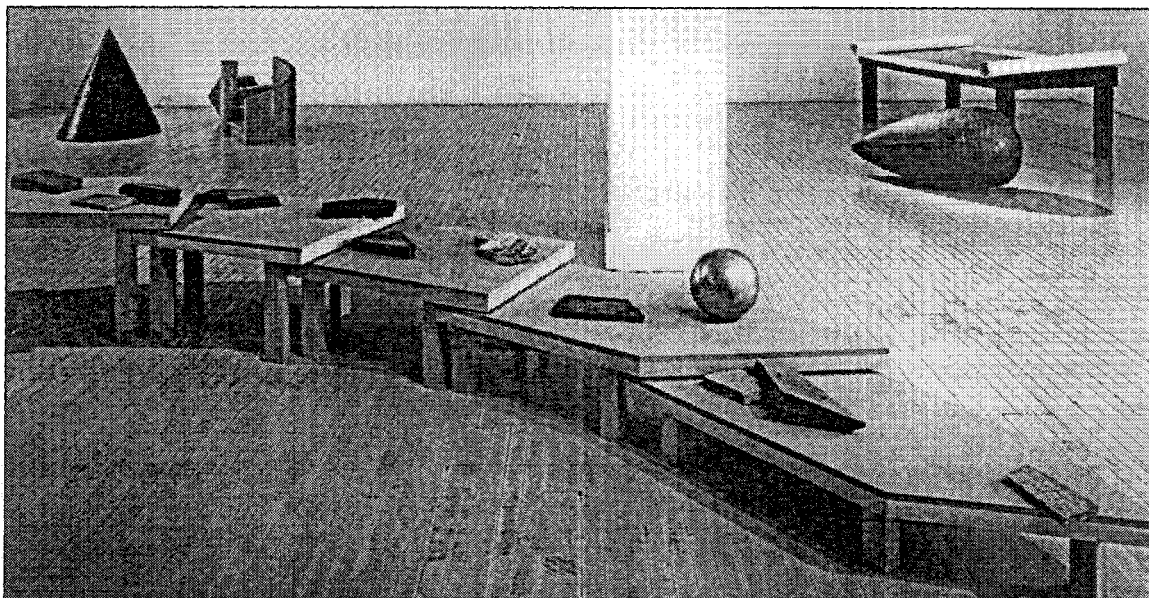


Figure 4.4: Eva Brandl, *Faust: Les Sortilèges*, 1993. (installation detail)

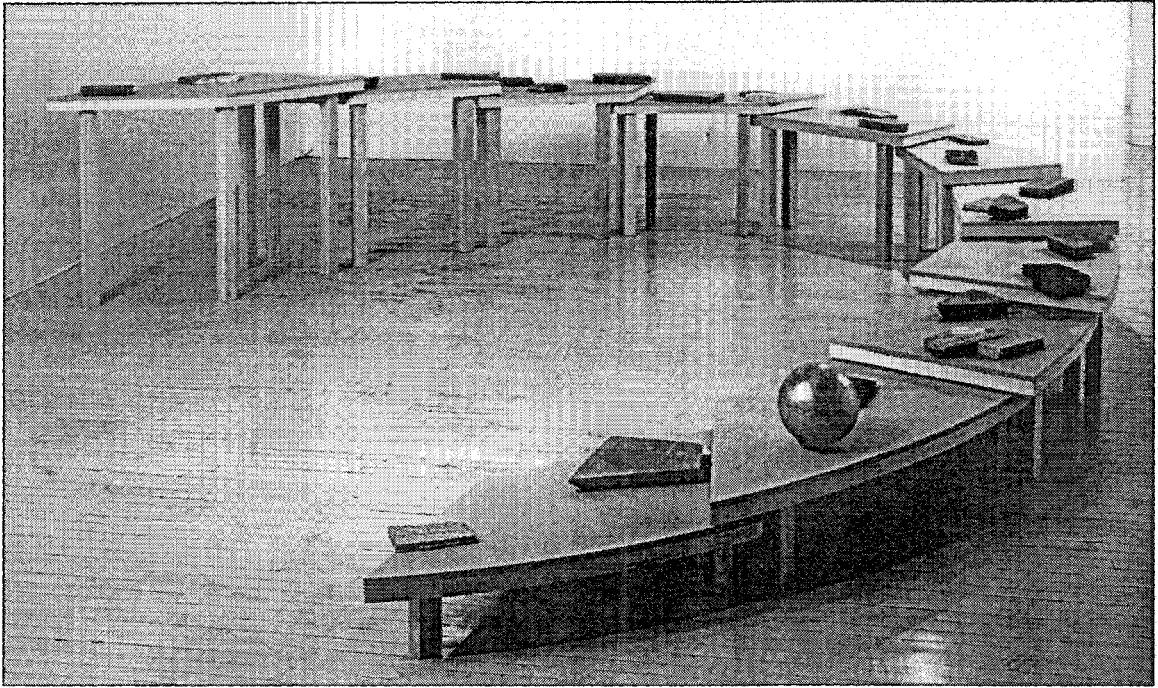


Figure 4.5: Eva Brandl, *Faust; Les Sortilèges, Les Errances*, 1993. (installation detail)

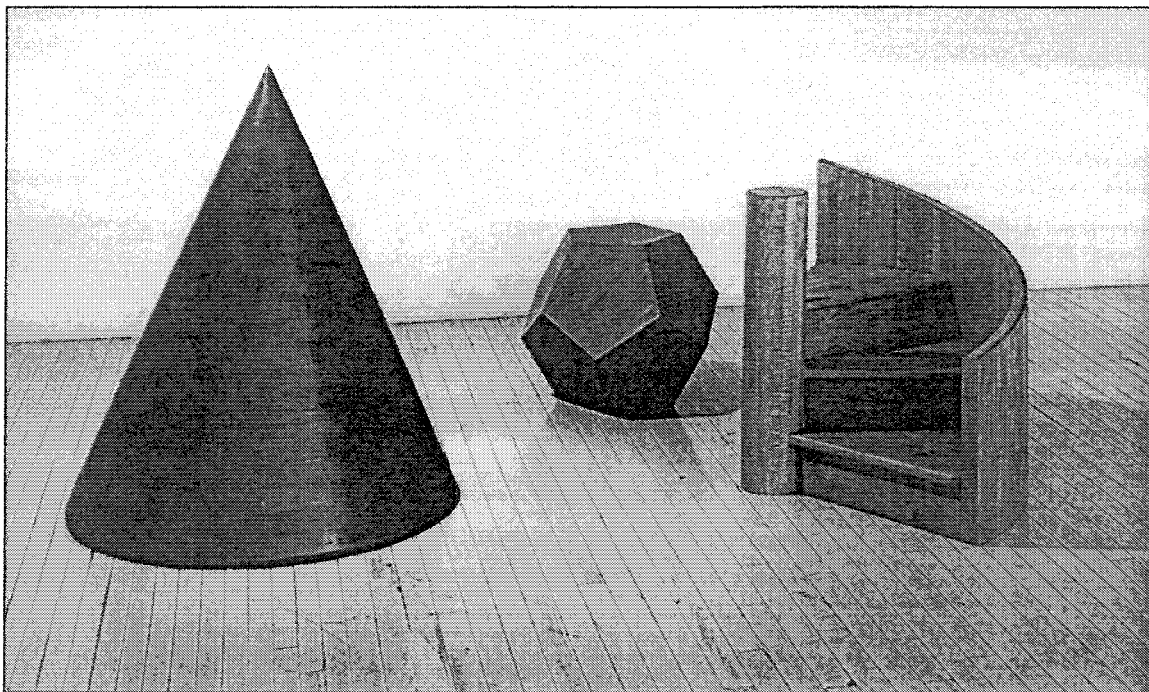


Figure 4.6: Eva Brandl, *Faust; Les Sortilèges, Le Drame du Savant*, 1993.
(installation detail)

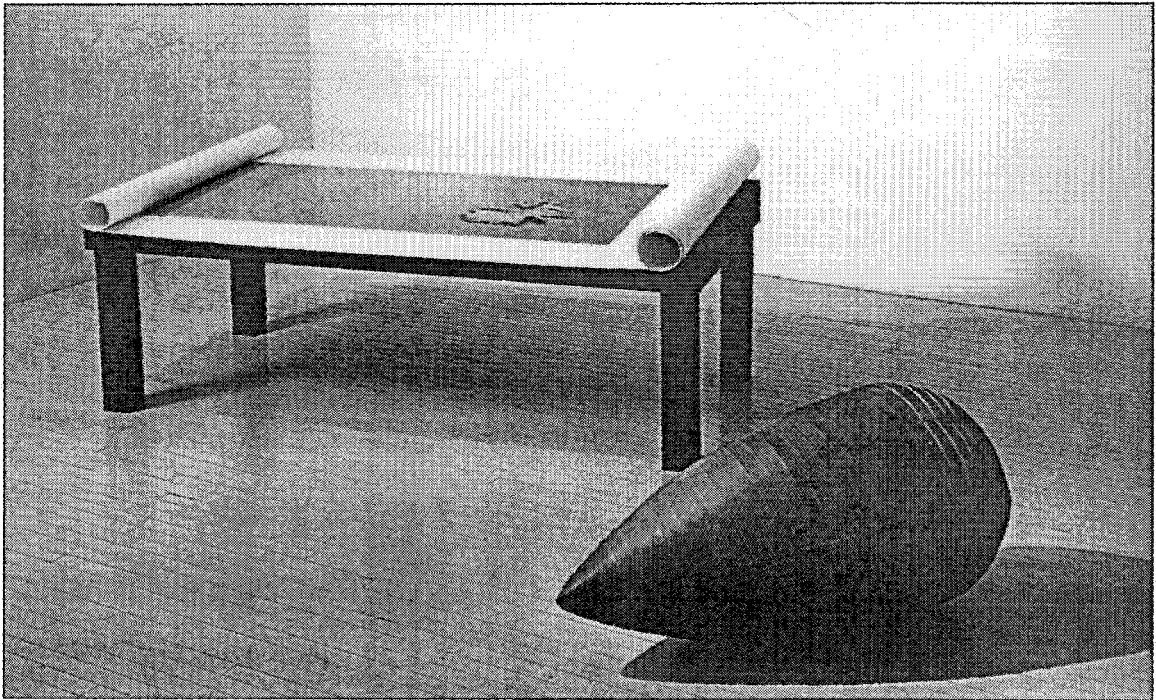


Figure 4.7: Eva Brandl, *Faust; Les Sortilèges, Interlude d'Hélène*, 1993.
(installation detail)

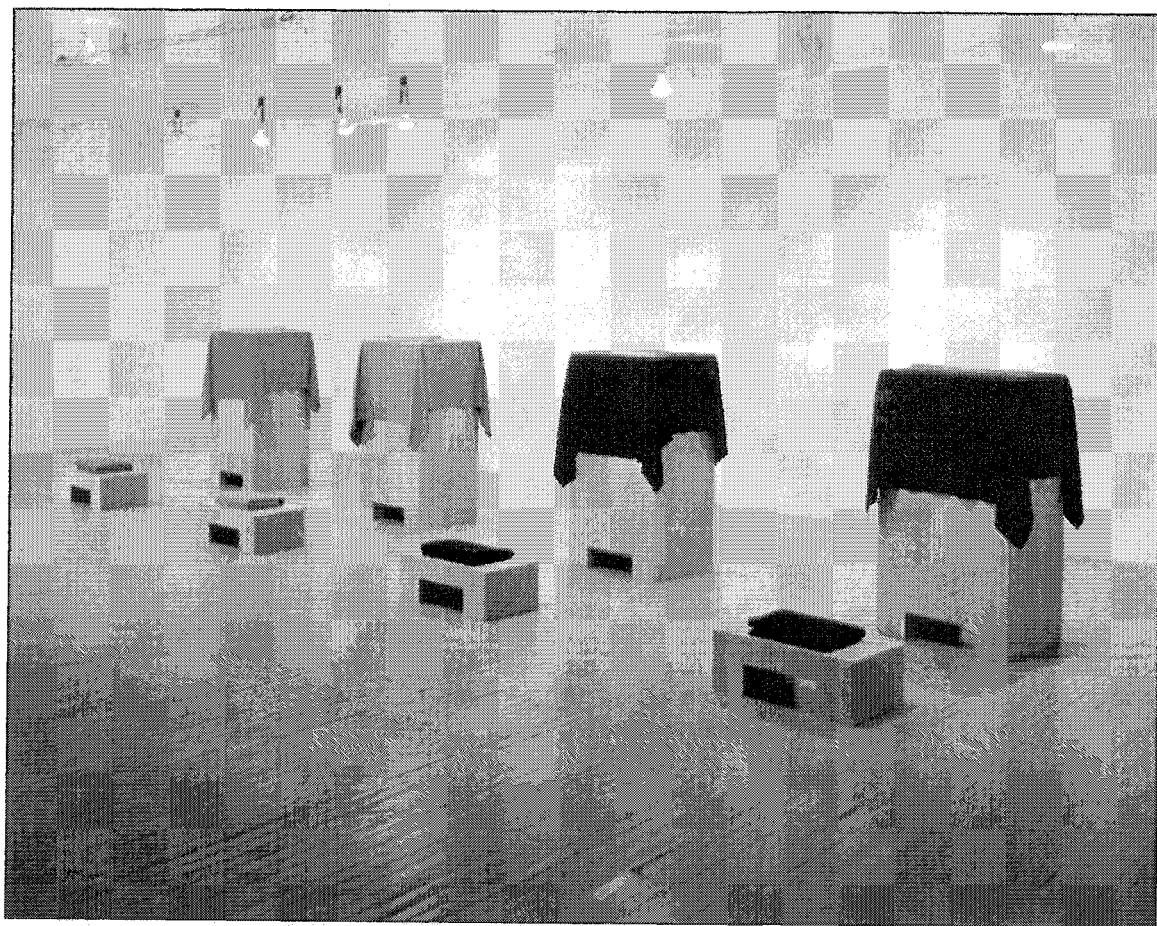


Figure 4.8: Eva Brandl, *Faust ou la Tentation du Possible*, 1996. Pulpits (installation detail)

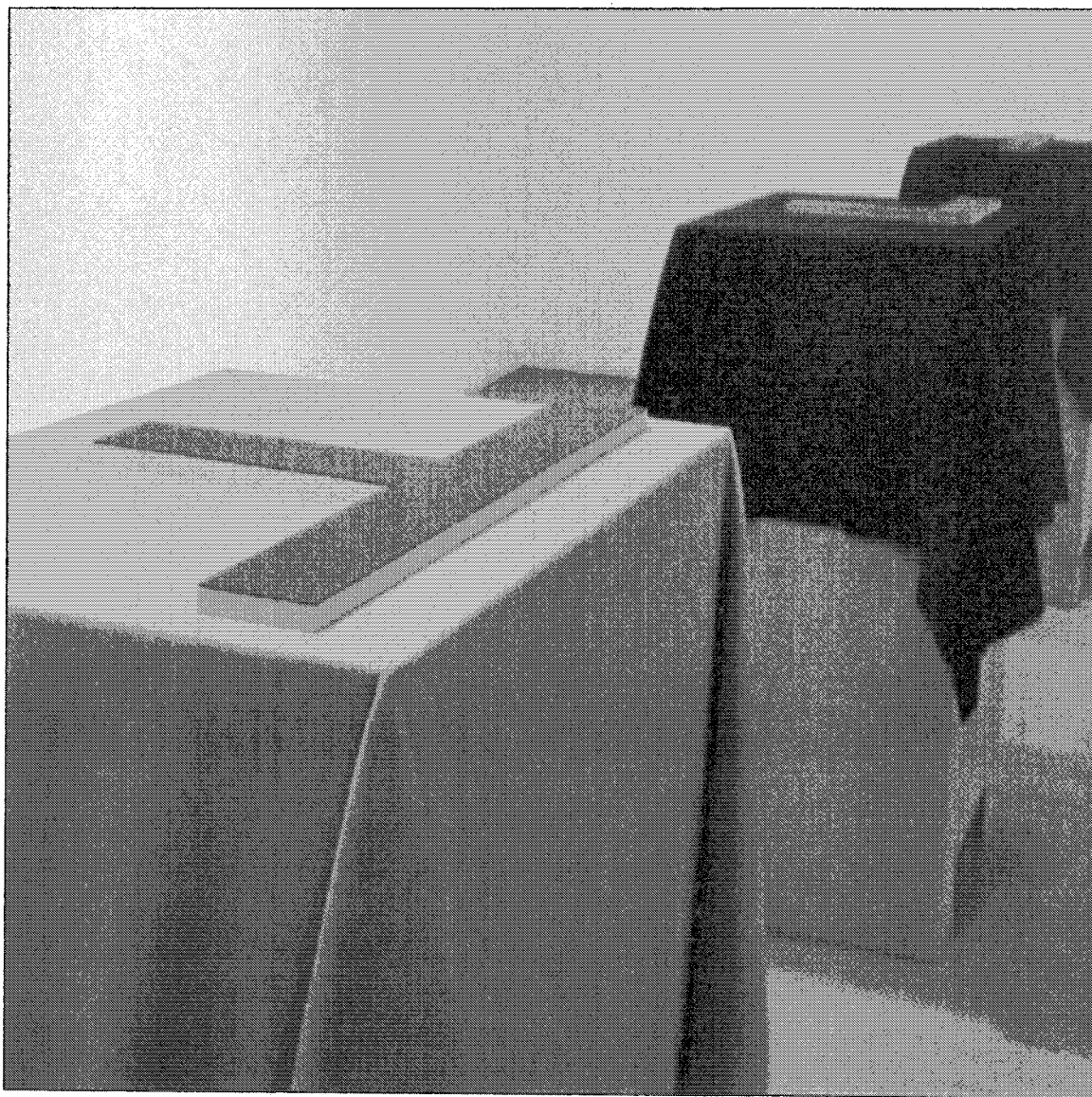


Figure 4.9: Eva Brandl, *Faust ou la Tentation du Possible*, 1996. Felt sign (installation detail)

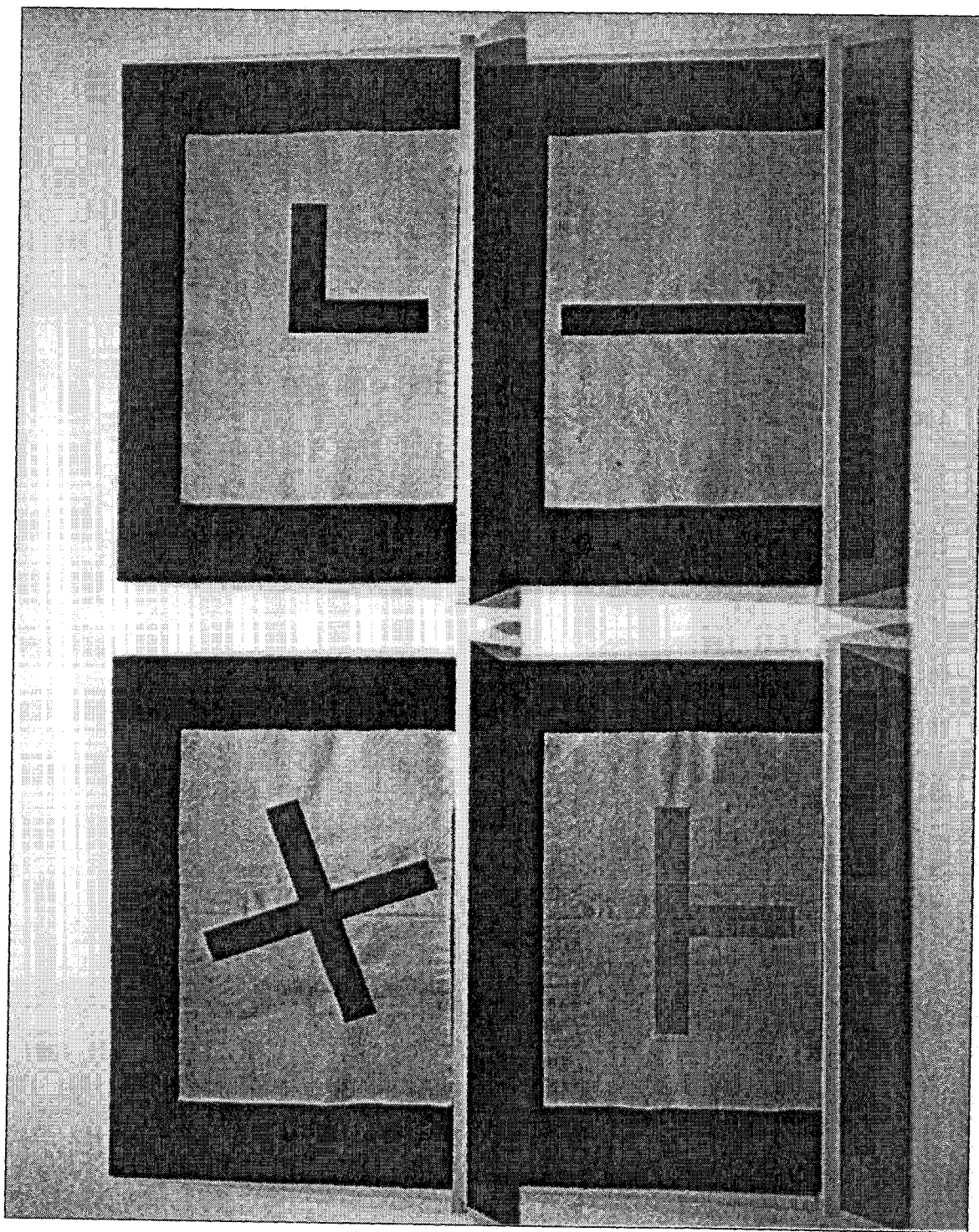


Figure 4.10: Eva Brandl, *Faust ou la Tentation du Possible*, 1996. Painted sign (installation detail)

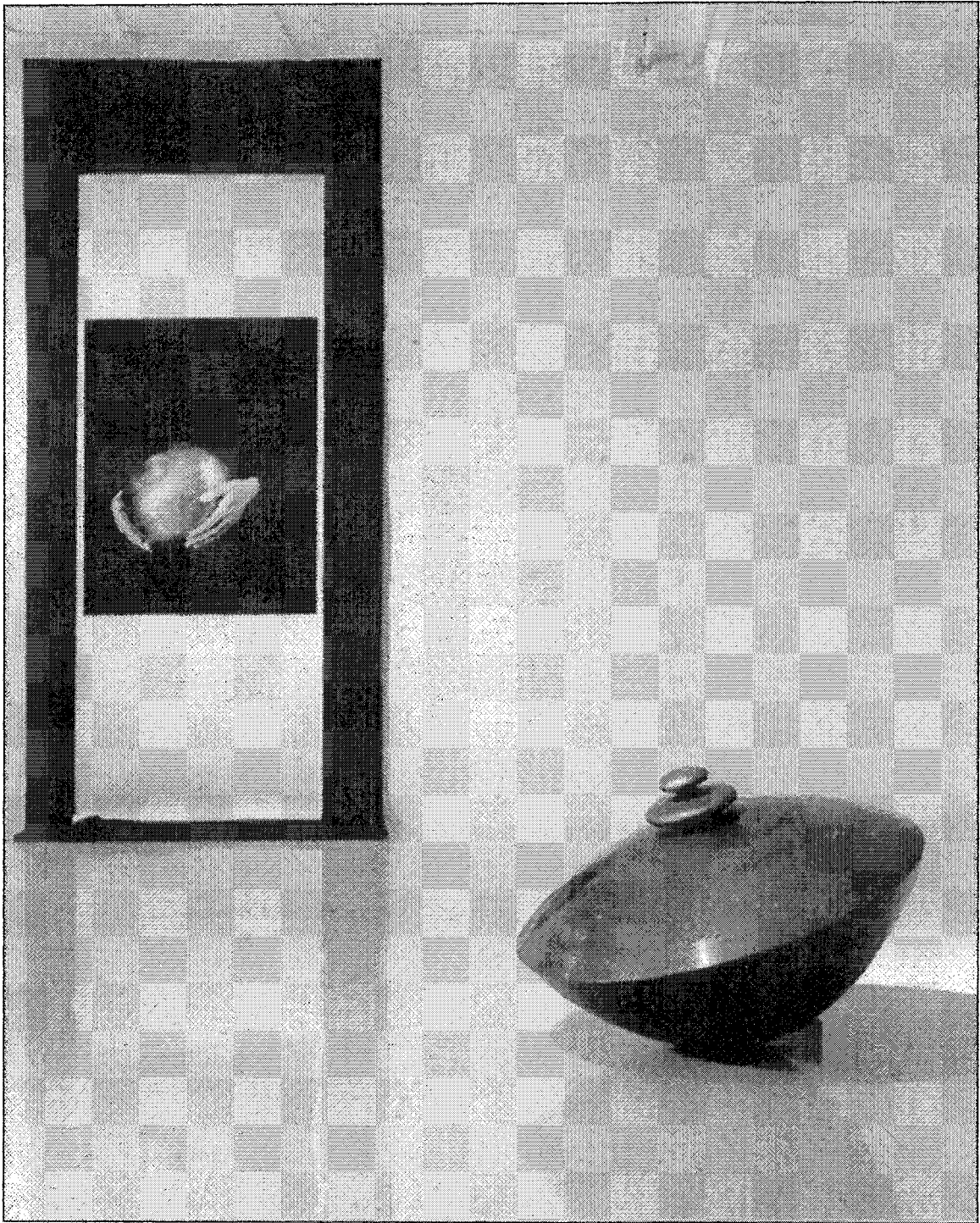


Figure 4.11: Eva Brandl, *Faust ou la Tentation du Possible*, 1996. Top and sphere (installation detail)

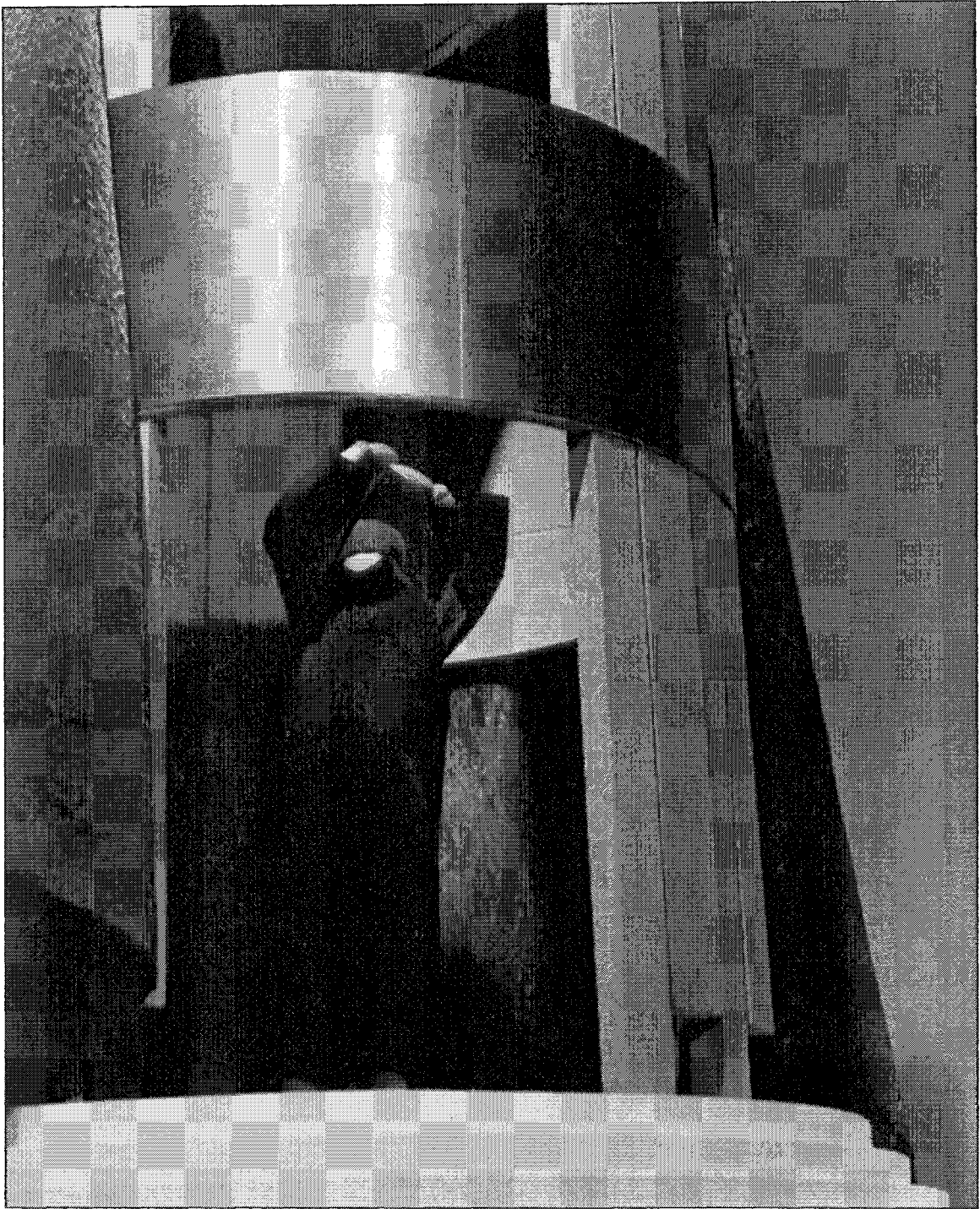


Figure 4.12: Eva Brandl, *Faust ou la Tentation du Possible*, 1996. Faust/Beuys (installation detail)

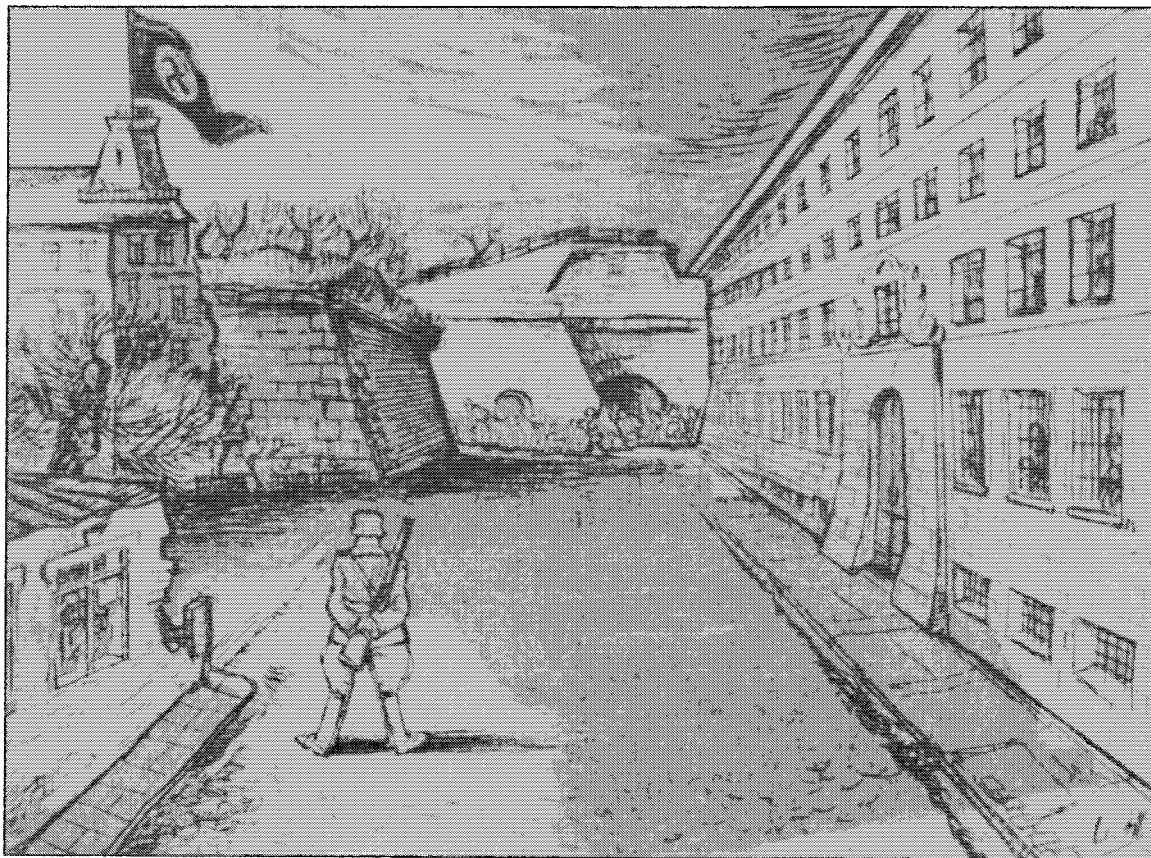


Figure 5.1: Leo Haas, *Theresienstadt*, 1946. (lithograph, 18" x 12")



Figure 5.2: Eva Kessin, *Untitled*, 1942. (watercolour, 8" x 10")



Figure 5.3: Katja Kessin, *Encore Anyone?*, 1987. (acrylic on canvas, 5' x 3.5')



Figure 5.4: Katja Kessin, *The German Shepherd*, 1988. (acrylic on canvas, 2.5' x 3')

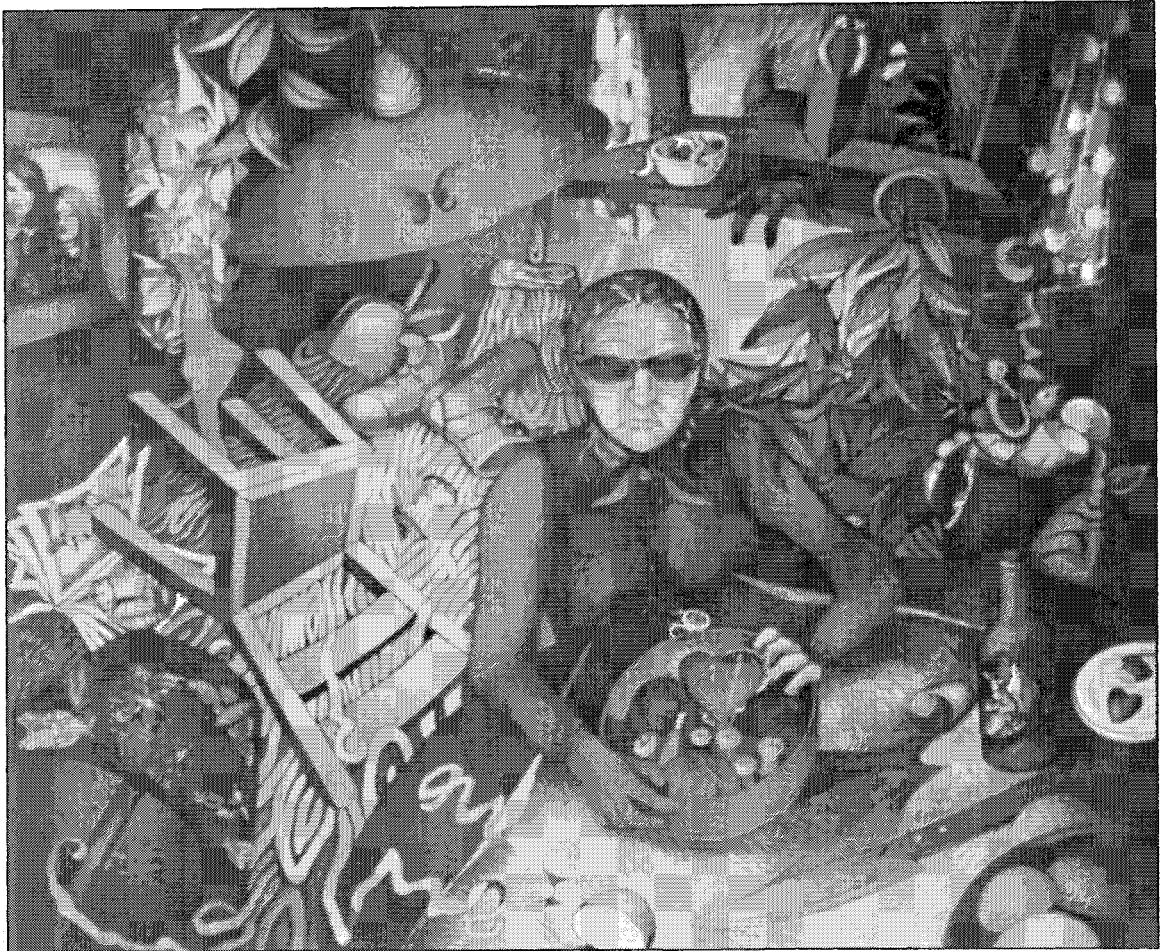


Figure 5.5: Katja Kessin, *Don't you see that everything's in perfect order?*, 1990. (acrylic on canvas, 4'10" x 4')



Figure 5.6: Katja Kessin, *Baking Little Men*, 1991. (acrylic on canvas, 4'10" x 4')

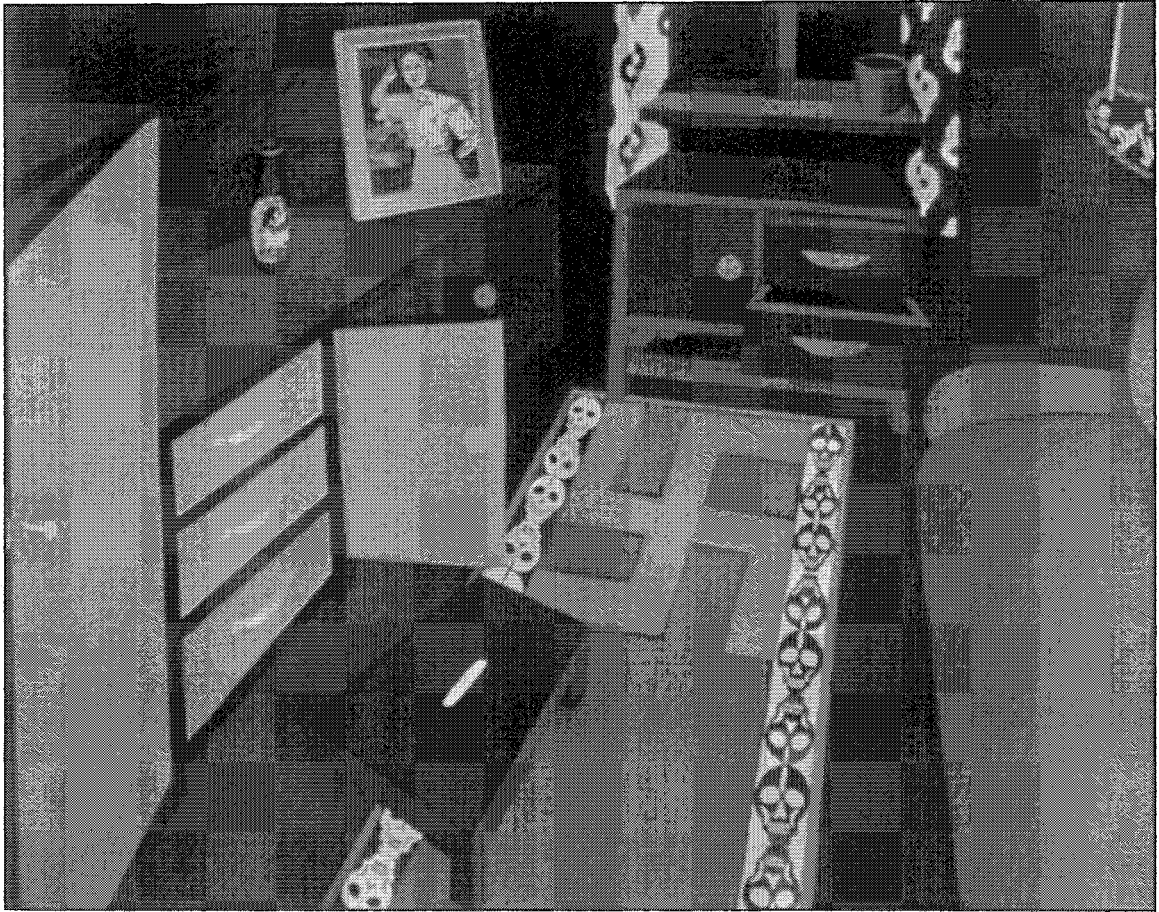


Figure 5.7: Katja Kessin, *To Dear Mother*, 1992. (acrylic on canvas, 4'10" x 4')



Figure 5.8: Katja Kessin, *Little Rascal*, 1993.
(sound-installation: acrylic on wooden radio cabinet, 2' x 4' x 1')

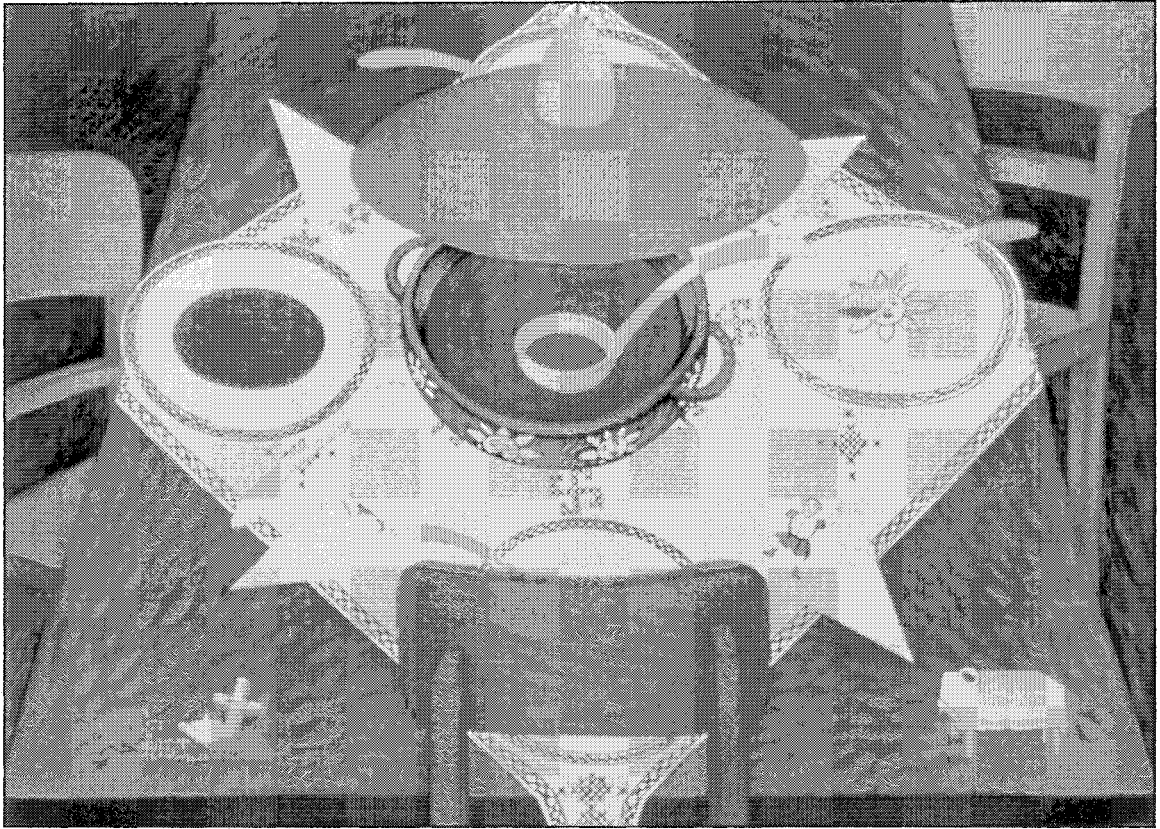


Figure 5.9: Katja Kessin, *I won't eat my soup*, 1994. (acrylic on canvas, 3'3" x 2'4")

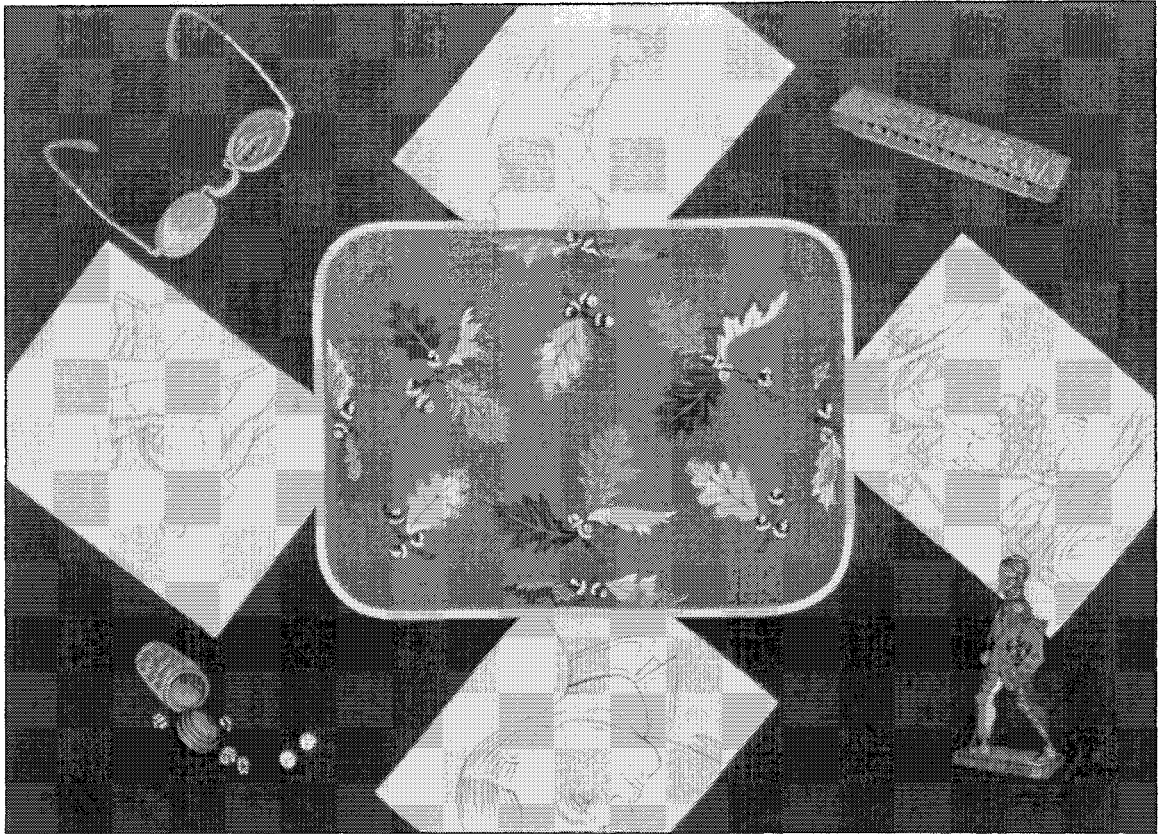


Figure 5.10: Katja Kessin, *Letters from the Front*, 1995.
(acrylic on canvas, 3'3" x 2'4")

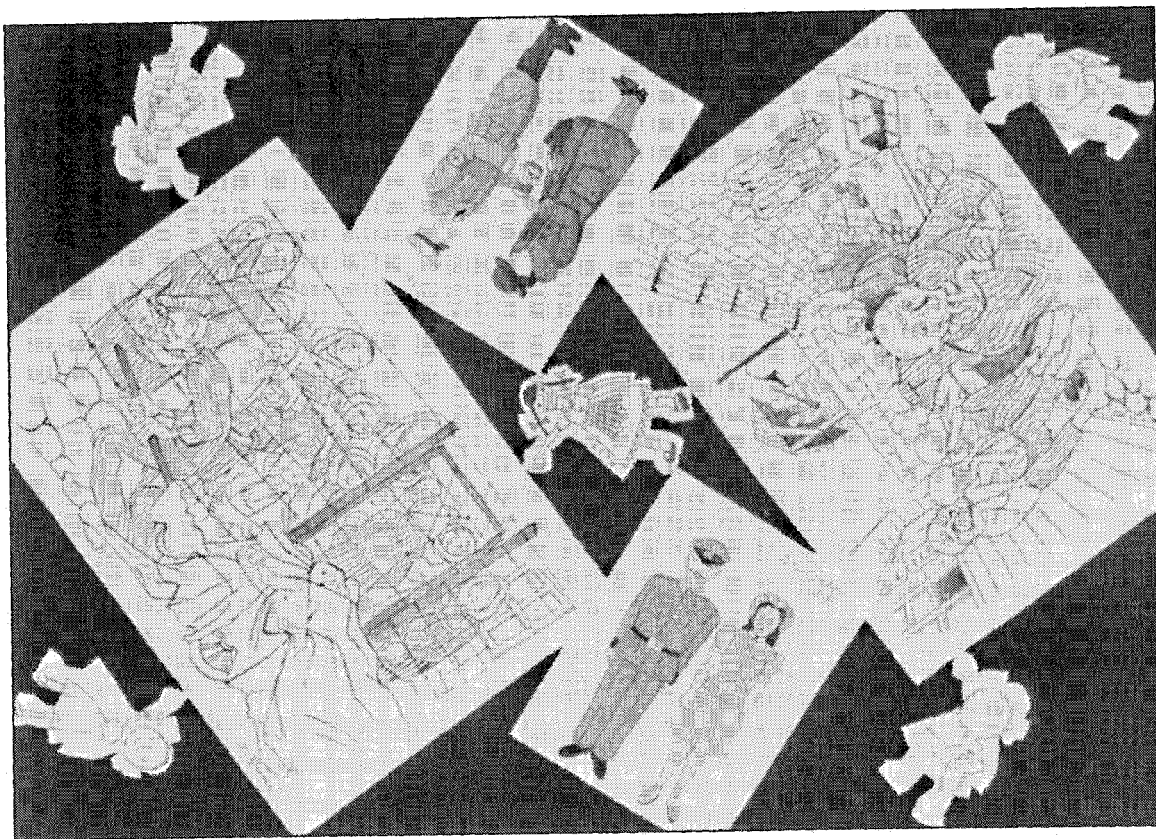


Figure 5.11: Katja Kessin, *Inheritance: and I decided to become an artist*, 1995.
(acrylic on canvas, 3'3" x 2'4")

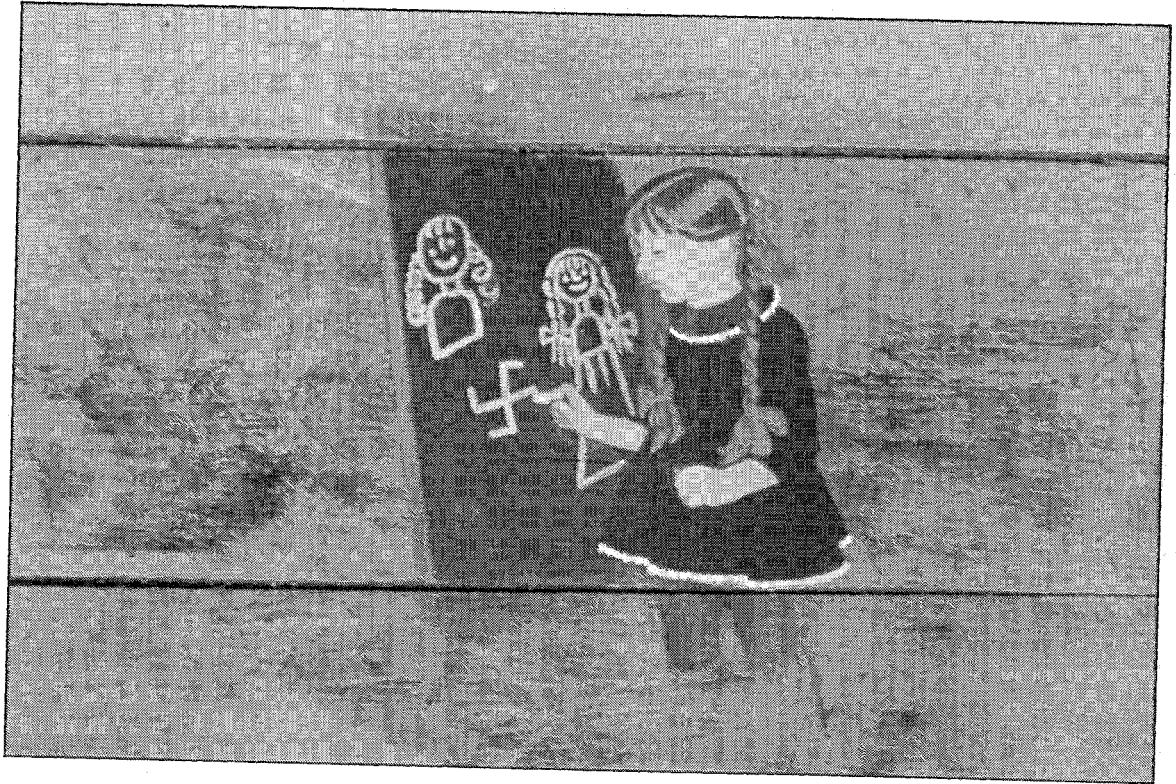


Figure 5.12: Katja Kessin, *Bad Girl*, 1996. (detail)
(acrylic on wooden desk, 2'2"x 1'10"x 2'6")

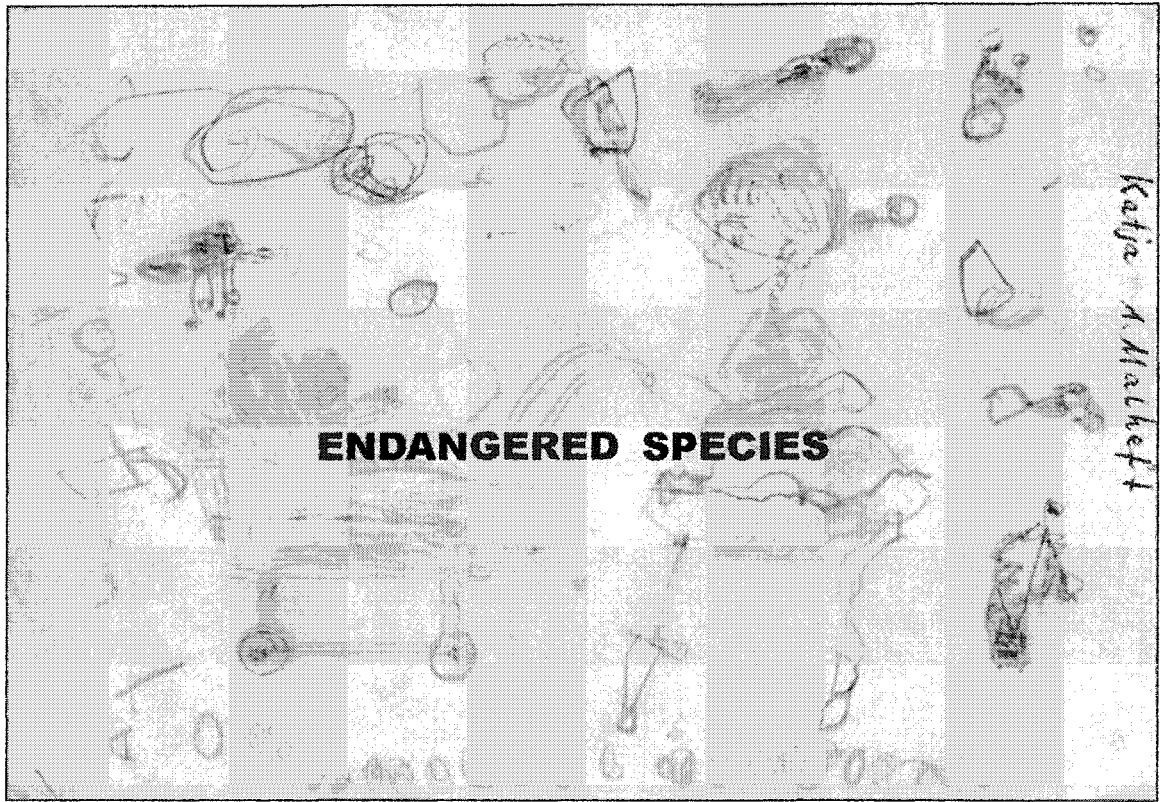


Figure 5.13: Katja Kassin, *Endangered Species*, 1961 to 1999. (companion piece)
(laminated colour copy, 7" x 4")

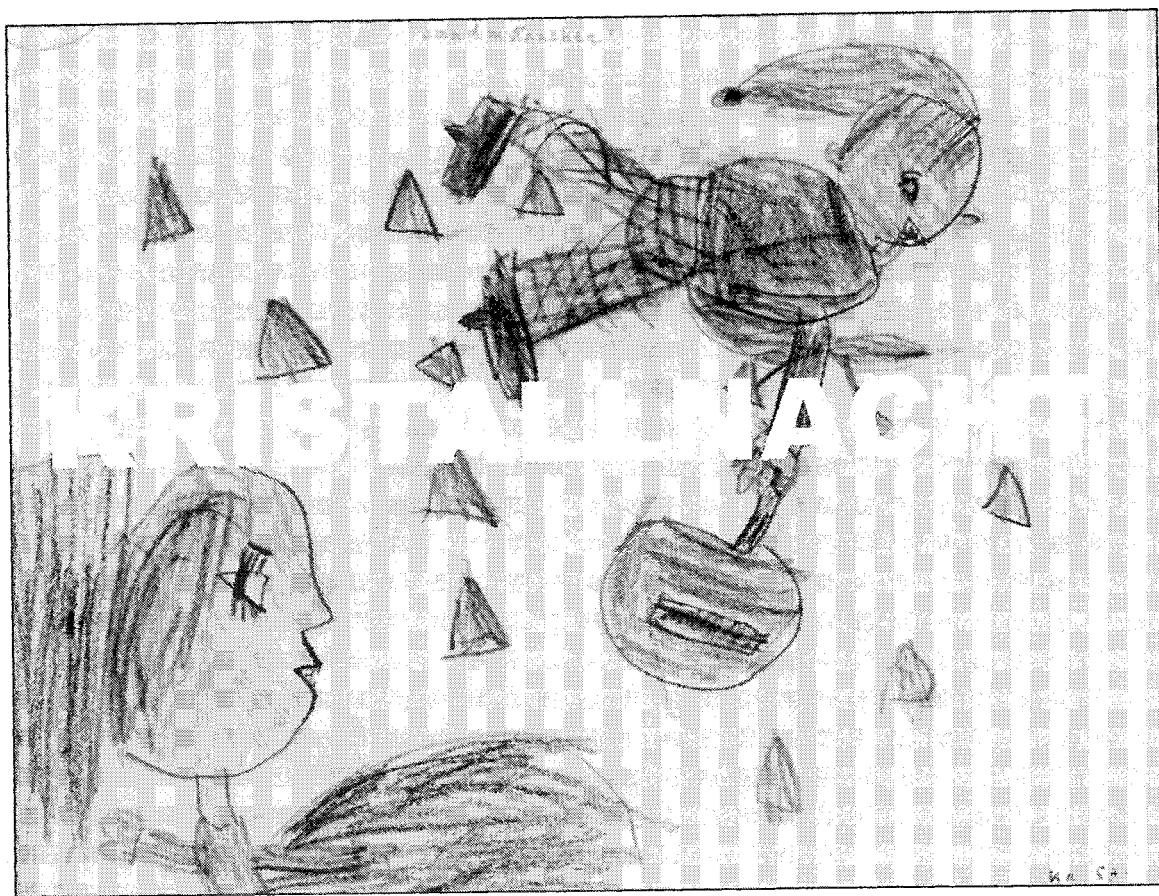


Figure 5.14: Katja Kessin, *Kristallnacht*, 1964 to 1999. (companion piece)
(laminated colour copy, 10" x 8")



Figure 5.15: Katja Kessin, *Auschwitz*, 1964 to 1999. (companion piece)
(laminated colour copy, 10" x 8")



Figure 5.16: Katja Kessin, *J is for Jesus*, 1999.
(from *A is for Auschwitz*, print on paper, 11" x 8.5")

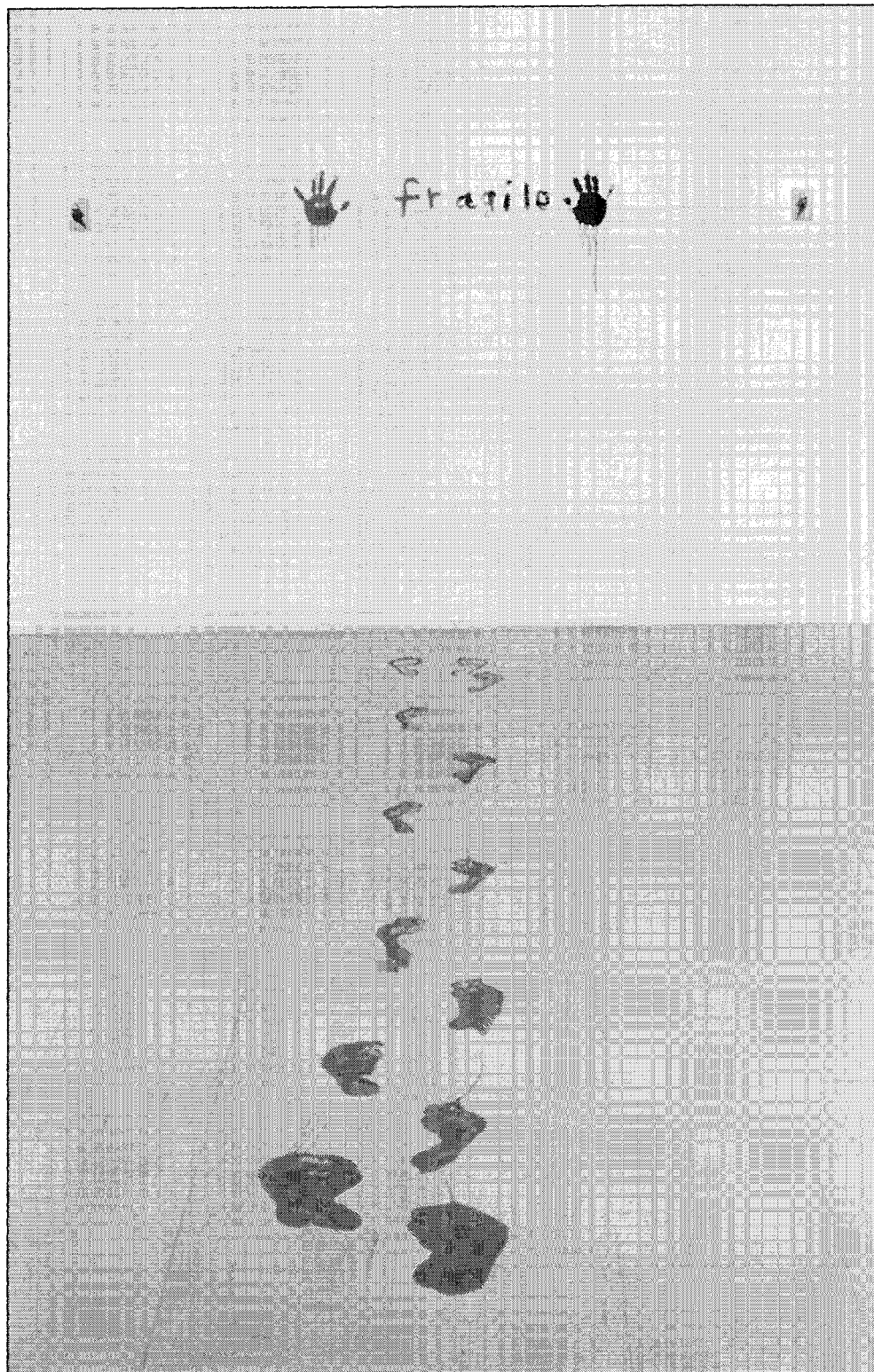


Figure 5.17: Katja Kessin, *fr/agile*, 2002.
(remains of performance)



Figure 6.1: Bettina Hoffmann, *Caught*, 1991. (installation detail)

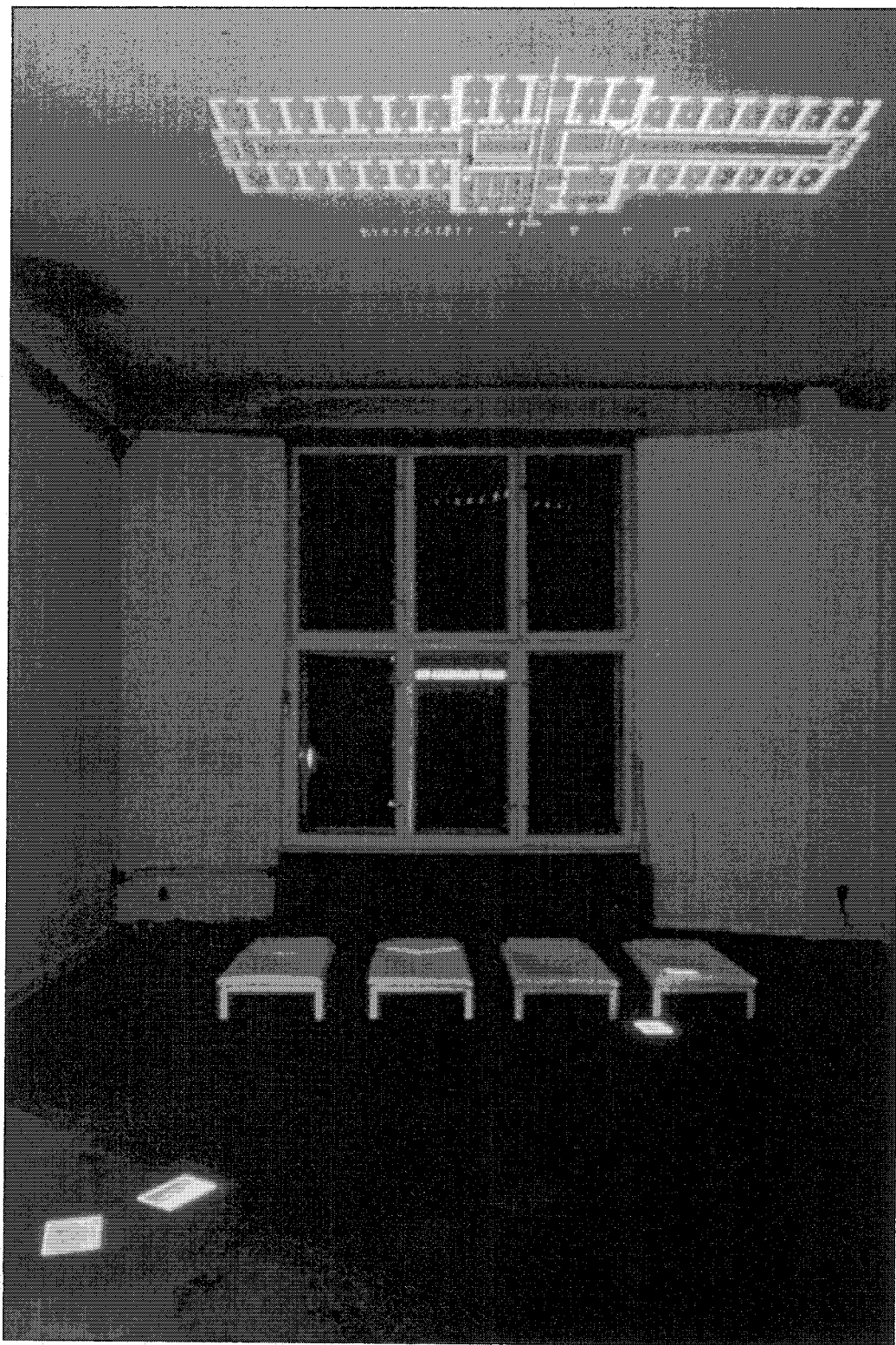


Figure 6.2: Bettina Hoffmann, *The emptied Dream*, 1991.
(installation detail)

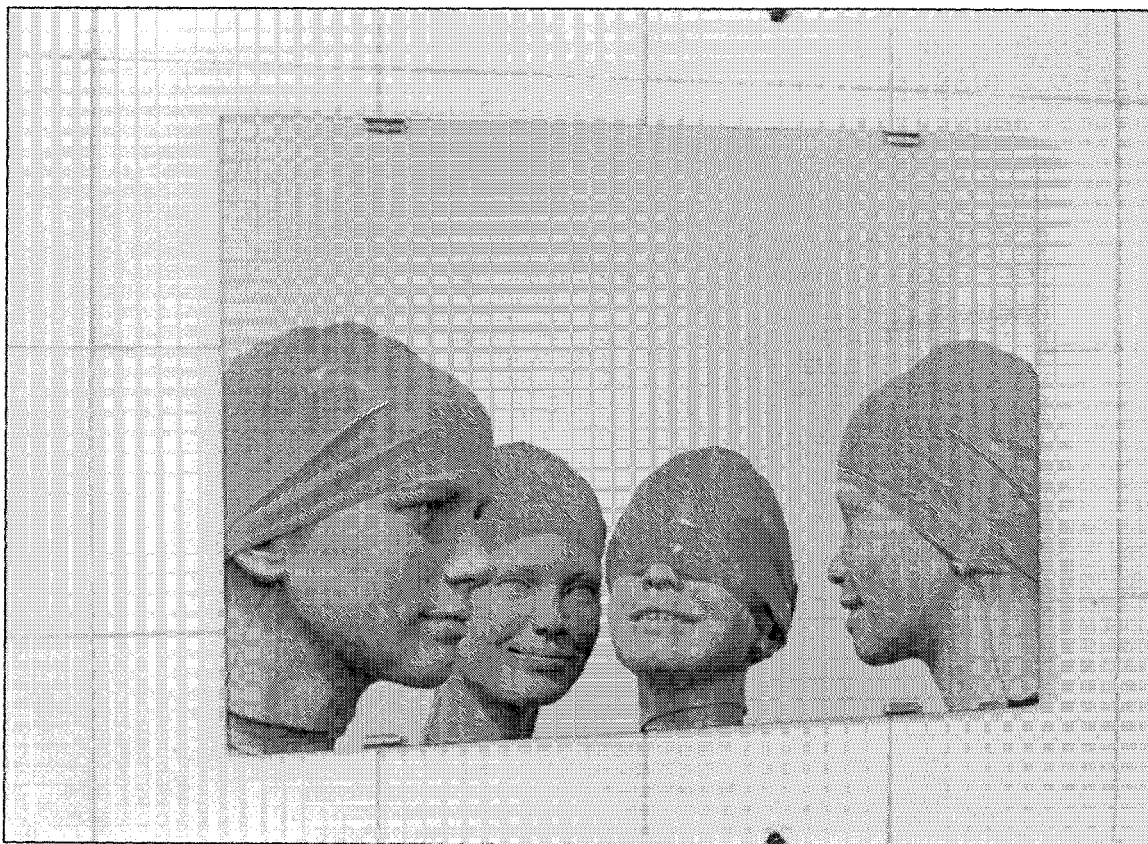


Figure 6.3: Bettina Hoffmann, *The Hidden Smiles*, 1994.
(installation detail)

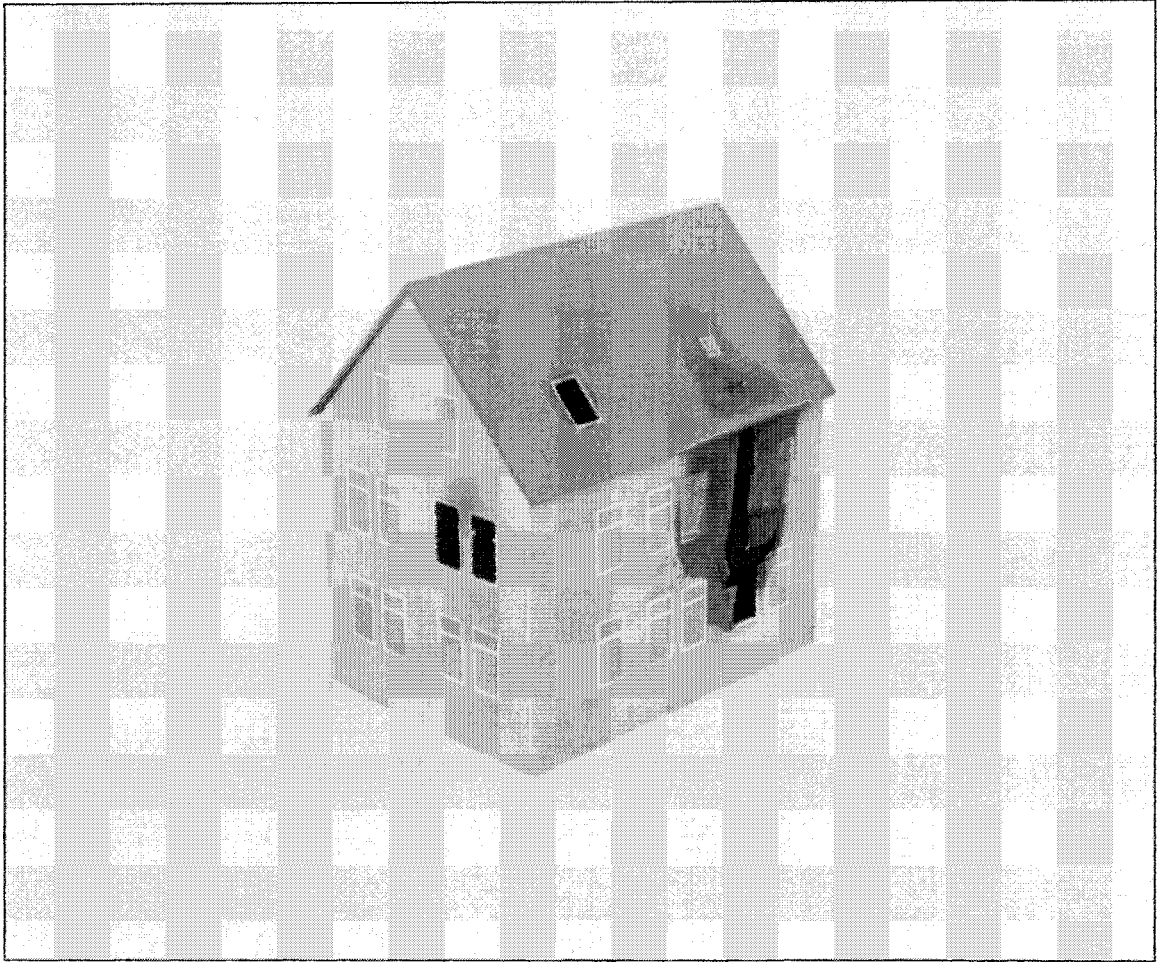


Figure 6.4: Bettina Hoffmann, *Pedagogical Toy*, 1992/93.
(painted and burnt plywood, 15" x 10" x 14")



Figure 6.5: Bettina Hoffmann, *Acid Bath*, 1992. (installation detail)

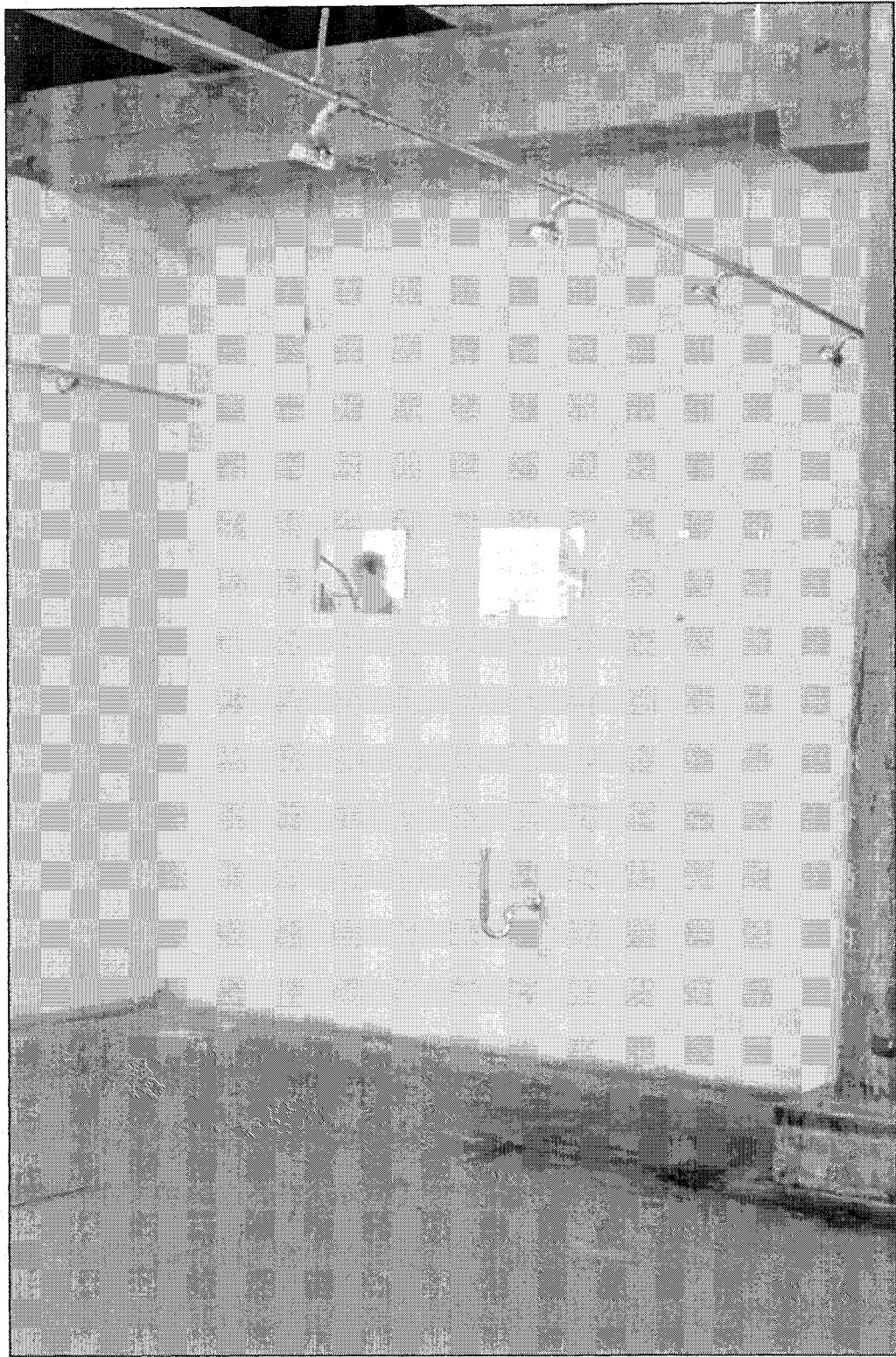


Figure 6.6: Bettina Hoffmann, *Public Showers*, 1993. (installation detail)



Figure 8.1: Katja Kessin, *Second Generation Perpetrator*, 2002.
(detail from triptych, glass-framed colour print, 12" x 9")

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